

June 2018

Greetings!!

Spring has really sprung here in Seattle. After the winter rains and the rising temperatures, the city is blooming. It is really beautiful around town. I am still keeping myself very busy with the various groups. I went down to the monks' retreat, which was very helpful in recharging my batteries.

The next of the series on karma was in the June newsletter of the Serene Reflection Dharma Association. We will reprint it at the end of this email for those who do not get the newsletter.

I would like to talk a bit about what I see is a cause of great suffering for many, including people I am close to, which makes this an issue that comes up quite often for me. What I am referring to is fault-finding and being critical of others. In today's world, this can be fed detrimentally by social media and other external stimuli. When I was growing up, we didn't have these diversions, but that did not stop us from fault-finding and criticizing. It was almost a way of life on our street corners, parks, bars, and restaurants. Going even further back, there is an ancient teaching from Master Hai Neng (638-713AD), which I will now quote from. (It appears that this was a spiritual problem even 1300 years ago.)

From the Sutra of Hai Neng:

He who treads the path in earnest
Sees not the mistakes of the world,
If we find fault with others,
We ourselves are also in wrong,
When other people are wrong, we should ignore it,
For it is wrong for us to find fault
By getting rid of the habit of fault-finding,
We cut off a source of defilement.

Master Neng gives us very powerful words in suggesting that when people are in the wrong, we are to ignore it. When we follow this path, we are able to stay in the flow of the non-judgmental love of the Eternal. This is not so easy for many of us. It seems easy sometimes to jump on someone when we disagree with what they are saying and to be critical. We may find this empowering to ourselves, taking refuge in the egocentric self. This is delusion. When we act like this, we are just creating our own suffering. Although we are all susceptible to this type of thinking, I imagine most of us know someone who is consumed with being overly critical and finding fault with others, embodying an attitude of negativity. Being on the receiving end of that can be

uncomfortable, but it is the person themselves who is experiencing true suffering, since they are holding on to the anger that goes along with this behavior, and are not able to let it go. It is a painful way to live, especially since the person is not aware of it at the time. For us, it is important in our training to be mindful of our reactions and to continue to have compassion, staying still in our meditation so as to allow the non-judgmental love of the Eternal to flow freely.

Training and meditation have helped me immensely with this attitude of negativity. It is so easy to allow ourselves to be drawn into it, particularly as the attitude can be triggered by so many of the every day events of life. For example, most of us have either a friend or family member who is habitually late. Our immediate reaction is to find fault with this behavior, to be very critical of it, and angry about it. Instead, we want to remain open-hearted, and show compassion, not only to the other person, but to ourselves as well, by not allowing the anger to fester and by not allowing ourselves to be drawn into a well of negativity. Through the stillness of our meditation and training we can instead remain in the flow of the Eternal.

In recent talks focusing on this teaching, many people have asked how activism fits in with our meditation and training. There is nothing wrong with activism, but what I would say is that we need to be very mindful of our thoughts and actions. It can be very easy in situations where we disagree with a point of view, to then get angry, and become critical and negative. This ultimately leads to our own suffering. There are a few steps I would suggest here. First, it may help to do extra meditation before you act. Second, be aware of your intent, keeping an eye on your egocentric self as it tries to permeate and control your thoughts and emotions. Lastly, I would stress to not only keep an open mind, but to open your heart as well, for then you allow the purity and compassion of the Eternal to flow.

I would like to close with a teaching of Rev Master Jiyu from her great retreat in 1976. I will paraphrase a bit:

"Do not criticize the way of another, do not call it into question. Look within it and see the Eternal. Look with the mind of the Eternal and you will see the heart of the Eternal flow."

A really beautiful way to live.

And now, here is my recent article on karmic inheritance from the Serene Reflection Dharma Association Newsletter:

Karmic Inheritance

Rev. Master Basil Singer

[Seattle Dharma Refuge](#)

When I was young I would experience waves of intense feelings. I didn't know where they were coming from. Sometimes they would last a few days. They were feelings of alienation, sadness, inadequacy and fear, and I just felt downright weird. I couldn't be with my family or friends, and I just said I was feeling sick. What worked was to take walks on the beach and go to Coney Island and go on the rides and EAT all kinds of stuff.

When I got older I asked around if anyone knew about this kind of thing. My sister and friends knew nothing. I then got into all kinds of things that were very unhelpful. Then, as I have [written about before](#), I yelled for help. I was led to Rev. Master Jiyu and her teachings of Buddhism. The first few months at the monastery it came up for me from Rev. Master's teaching that what I had was "karmic inheritance." Through Rev. Master's teaching I saw that this is a very big aspect of our existence. Rev. Master says this in many teachings.

In [her Kyojukaimon commentary](#) on "Cease from Evil" Rev. Master Jiyu says quite clearly how important karma is. "The Law of Karma is one of the five laws of the universe; it is absolute, it is inescapable. What happens, or happened, or will happen to you or to anyone else is caused by karma."

Early in my training I realized the feelings I had were karmic feelings. Like most people I didn't see the cause but as it is said, "feelings are the reaper of karma."

When I was a young novice monk something did come up one night, a kind of dream-vision of something from my karmic past. It was a railroad car crowded with people. There was great sadness and the smells were very strong. When I woke up I was very shaken. The smells were with me for most of the day.

We can speculate what that was, but that is not helpful. Just to offer that up to the Love and Compassion of the Eternal in our meditation and training is enough. That's where this kind of karmic pain wants to go. It is looking for love and the Pure Love of the Eternal is the medicine.

I know many people have trouble with this teaching. I know it is hard to grasp. I have found it true for myself. In the booklet, [An Introduction to the Tradition of Serene Reflection Meditation](#), Rev. Master Jiyu provides the clearest and most cogent explanation of the central importance of karma in our lives that I have ever seen and I am very grateful for it:

What people usually think of as their "self," "soul," or "spirit" is actually an impermanent combination of several components. Some components, such as the ego, the sense of self, the body image, and the like are personal and individual but

are continually changing and do not survive death. Another component, the Buddha Nature, because it is one with the Buddha Essence of the Universe, is unchanging and eternal and yet, for the very same reason, is neither personal nor individual. A third type of component is what is known as karma; this is the spiritual force set in motion by all volitional actions, whether good or ill. When we speak of a person's karma, we refer to the sum total of all such forces currently remaining effective which he or she has produced in this life- time or has acquired at the time of conception from other beings which have left it unfulfilled at the times of their deaths. Positive volitional acts produce positive karma, sometimes called merit, which has positive effects on the lives of beings. This positive karma, already being at peace by its very nature, is at one with the infinite Sea of Merit of the Cosmic Buddha upon the death of the individual and thus provides no basis for an immortal soul. Negative karma, if not exhausted or purified in this lifetime, continues on after death and conditions the conception of a new being who will have an opportunity to allow it to run its course or to purify it, thus setting it to rest. Once its force is spent, negative karma ceases to exist, hence it, too, cannot produce an immortal and individual soul. The karma produced in this life and the karma inherited from other beings are not of different types: they both act in the same way and are indistinguishable. Thus, in Buddhism, there really is no such thing as an individual and immortal soul....

I would like to end with a visual diagram that first came up for me in 2004 at a retreat in the Netherlands that may help to illustrate the process of karmic inheritance and conversion through training. (Thanks to some friends of Seattle Dharma Refuge from the University of Washington for creating the graphic.)

With all my heart,

Rev Basil