

December 2018

Greetings!

I would like to start this email by letting you know that I am seeking donations to help pay for dental work. Recently a front tooth of mine fell out. The funds needed for the dental work are much more than I have. If anyone would like to help with this it would be greatly appreciated. The way to go about it would be to send a check made out to “North Cascades Buddhist Priory”, with the statement that it is “for Rev. Basil’s dental work”. Then, you could mail the check to me at: Rev Basil Singer, 2208 2nd Ave, #404, Seattle, WA 98121. As I say, any help would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

I would like to wish you all a very joyous holiday season and a very happy new year. I say this every year, and I will say it again – this can be a very difficult time for our training and meditation. There are a couple of common, yet unhelpful, ways in which we can go. The way I can go is to do too much, to be all over the map and scattered. The other direction is to go with depression and despair. Both directions cause suffering. Being mindful of these states really helps. Also, a bit of extra meditation really helps.

At this time I would like to thank those who help me with my writings. Without them it would not be possible. Thank you to Rev Master Bennet, Geoff and Allan.

Below we are reprinting from the Serene Reflection Dharma Association newsletter my article on the three blames, and an article on blame and a poem by Geoff.

With all my heart,

Rev. Basil

The Three Blames

Rev. Master Basil Singer

Seattle Dharma Refuge

When I became a senior monk the first talk I gave was on “blame,” which was a subject that was really fresh for me at the time. During the years when I was a novice monk I experienced how blame came up for me when I was not feeling well personally, or spiritually, or when I was just very tired and stressed. Self-blame and/or other-blame would also come up for me when I made a mistake and was corrected for it (or recognized the mistake myself). I saw how the resulting downward-looking attitude of condemnation and criticism of others and myself was pulling me out of my training and meditation. The medicine for this spiritual illness would have been to do extra meditation and bows and let the Water of the Spirit wash through these attitudes with

its Pure Love. Instead, I let these dark and negative attitudes go untreated and cause me spiritual pain and dis-ease.

As I became more experienced in training I began to see that it was the egocentric self, enticing me with seemingly better—and easier to ingest—alternatives to the medicine of training. The drug the egocentric self prescribes is a mixture of greed, hate, and delusion. At some point a memory from my past came to me that reminded me that what can seem a tonic for pain actually enhances the pain.

In the late 1960's a very close friend became addicted to heroin. He really loved using it. He tried to convince me to use it too, insisting that this was the greatest thing around. I told him that I didn't like needles. But more importantly, something in me that was deeper than fear of physical pain said, "Don't go there." Although I didn't think of it as such at the time, I realize now that it was "the still, small voice within my mind and heart" (1) warning me that this would be breaking Precepts I didn't even know about at the time. I had to repeatedly say, "No!" to my friend because, since it seemed to him to be helping him deal with his pain, out of his love for me he kept trying to convince me that I should try it, too.

It seems to me that the egocentric self tries to "help" our spiritual pain in a similar way. The selfish self is not evil or wicked. It is just that greed, hate, and delusion are what it knows; and it believes that greed, hate and delusion will really help my pain. Pure meditation and being continually mindful of the Precepts can really help in seeing that the help offered by the self does not work and is, in truth, destructive. And just as I continued to love my friend even while he was tempting me with heroin, we learn not to hate the self. We learn to simply not listen to the self's delusions and to not go with its habitual impulses. This is where the mindfulness of our training comes in.

Also during this time, when I became a senior monk, it came up for me that there were three major areas where this kind of blame would come up for me: 1. Blaming others; 2. Blaming myself; 3. Blaming a particular situation. I also saw how my heart would harden and get mean-spirited in all kinds of situations when I allowed myself to get caught up in these three blames. I could give many examples from my own experience, but no doubt you can provide your own.

There are teachings that really helped me then and still help me. One of the teachings is to just do what needs to be done, and to do what you can do. As the Buddha taught:

In making the four offerings—your joy in awakening your heart, your reverence for the Dharma, your resolve to train, and your practice—know your capacity and be content with that. Be quick to go about doing services and work, but do not seek to amass tasks. These guides summarize the characteristics of keeping to the Precepts. (2)

Just focusing on doing the next thing that needs to be done really helps me cut through the distracting stuff the self brings up. This goes with the old Zen teaching of “live in the present moment, do not dwell on the past or fear the future.” At difficult times this is very tough to do, but as I have always said, well worth the effort. Another teaching that always worked for me is remembering that everybody—everything—has the Buddha Nature, nothing is ever excluded. Keeping the Precepts in mind when the self is offering delusional enticements is also very helpful.

In conclusion, I will say again how this ongoing training in meditation and the Precepts has been so helpful to me and many others. It is not as easy as indulging the impulses of the self. But despite the difficulties, it is much more fulfilling to live a life grounded in meditation and the Precepts, and to take refuge in Something Greater than the self—Something that is so magnificent, pure, compassionate.... As I often say, it’s a beautiful way to live!

¹ As Rev. Master Jiyu puts it in her Commentary on the Kyojukaimon, “Know, indeed, that when the still, small voice within my mind and heart says ‘Yes,’ I must obey that teaching. When it says ‘No,’ I must not disobey that teaching.” <http://northcascadesbuddhistpriory.org/Precepts/Kyojukaimon.pdf>

² “The Buddha’s Last Teachings,” in *Buddhist Writings* (Mount Shasta, CA: Shasta Abbey Press, 1994), p. 248.

Why Refrain from Blame?

Geoff Nisbet

My understanding of Buddhist teaching is that if we blame others, or if we blame circumstances, then we are putting ourselves out of harmony with the way things actually are, because in fact Reality (the Eternal) is benefitting each and every one of us at all times. And if we put ourselves out of harmony with this Reality, then inevitably we will create further suffering for ourselves.

In so many areas of life it is easy to blame others, or to complain about circumstances. And it is easy to feel that the circumstances completely justify our apportioning of blame. And yet when we do this we are simply creating a cover, diverting attention off the real issue, which is internal to us.

I have certainly done my fair share of blaming on many occasions. However, I have found that as training has gone on, it is not so easy to let myself get away with it! If we sincerely meditate and train with an area of life that is causing us difficulty, then we will notice when we are blaming or complaining, and something in us knows that it is not

quite right. As we continue, and as we include the effort not to blame, over time the deeper aspects of what is going on start to manifest. For me, in training with one such difficult area, feelings of strong anxiety and then beneath that, a deep sorrow, have surfaced. Training and refraining from blaming have allowed that sorrow to arise—to be seen and felt in meditation—and thus to begin to be bathed in the Love it so longs for.

And so back to the point that Reality is benefitting us. We may not feel that the difficult circumstance that triggers our tendency to blame is benefitting us. However, it is pointing to something within us that needs help. If we can train with it, and refrain from indulging blame, then we allow the Help in.

The Golden Buddha

Geoff Nisbet

The Infinite Light of the Golden Buddha streams forth from the core,
beckoning us forward,
This world of our awareness is nothing but the Golden Buddha manifesting.
Second by second the miracle unfolds
As the Lord's Light illuminates all.
What else can one do but bow?