

March 2019

Greetings,

I hope all survived this rough winter. Here in Seattle we had 6 to 12 inches of snow. That pretty much closes the town up. We had to cancel a few meetings. Otherwise things are moving along, and I keep quite busy.

First, I would like to share something a member of the group at the assisted living facility wrote. Then, I would like to repeat an article on the Precepts from the Serene Reflection Dharma Association newsletter.

I want to wish all my love,

Take care, with bows

Rev Basil.

I FINALLY GOT IT!

After a year of trying to get the knack of letting go in Meditation, I finally got it! How to explain this isn't easy.

At first, just sitting quietly with Rev. Basil's meditation group at Mt. St. Vincent, I relaxed and relished the quiet. But I couldn't quite grasp the letting go. I kept wondering what came after that, finally deciding on fog. Rev. Basil reminded us that nothing happens. Without realizing it, I began to accept that I was in the present whenever I chose to meditate. But I still couldn't get the concept of letting go - until one day recently.

I was doing my best to meditate properly and let go of my thoughts a couple of times until I took another breath out and, viola, there was a peaceful nothingness. What a wonderful experience. In the now and no thoughts or feelings about the thoughts.

I know this is a first major step, with more to come, but what a wonderful place to be - no struggle.

P.S. (from Rev Basil) Rev Master Jiyu has said that this nothingness is the fullest, most magnificent nothingness a human being can experience.

The Precepts

Rev. Master Basil Singer
Seattle Dharma Refuge

Late winter is the time of year when Buddhist temples traditionally host Jukai, or “The Taking and Keeping of the Ten Precepts Retreat.” The several ceremonies during the retreat emphasize the primacy of the Precepts as the moral underpinning of our spiritual life. It is during this retreat that one can formally and publicly declare one’s wish to become a Buddhist. This is done during The Ceremony of Lay Ordination. During the ceremony one vows to take—and keep—the Three Treasures Precepts, the Three Pure Precepts, and each of the Ten Precepts. And by also verbally responding with the wish to keep the Precepts, those who have taken them previously reaffirm their commitment to them.

I first took the Precepts in 1983. Before then, I read every day Rev. Master Jiyu’s Commentary on the Precepts. I found it a liberating and enlightening change from a common fundamentalist attitude that strict adherence to the literal letter of the law is required for the spiritual life. Rev. Master Jiyu’s Commentary had a profound effect on me by revealing the positive purpose of the Precepts at the deepest level. By keeping the Precepts, we allow the magnificent flow of the pure love of the Eternal to stream through us at all times. When we break the Precepts, we block the flow and lapse into a state of suffering and lose the spiritual nourishment that this flow of the Water of the Spirit graces us with. We bring this suffering upon ourselves; it is not imposed on us by an external force or entity as punishment for “sin.” The karmic results of blocking the flow are suffering enough.

Trying to keep the Precepts has been a constant part of my training in the 36 years since my lay ordination. A very big aspect of what is termed mindfulness is simply being aware of those situations when we break the Precepts. For me, current events in the world are a particular trigger. Now, when I catch myself drawing away from a Precept and becoming, for example, angry, I say to myself something like, “Basil! Don’t go there!” This pulls me up short and reminds me to let go of the anger and live the all-accepting peace of meditation. And this is what we learn in formal meditation: to let the thoughts and emotions that lead to breaking the Precepts come up, simply acknowledge them, and let them go without pushing them away with self-judgmental aversion. Practicing this process at a deep level in formal meditation helps us recognize how we break the Precepts in our daily life and learn how to end the cycle.

I would like to now give an example how Rev. Master Jiyu’s Commentary on the Precepts has helped me. One of the Precepts is, “Do not defame the Three Treasures.” This Precept would seem simple for me to keep because I love the Three Treasures: the Buddha Treasure, which is the existence of the Eternal within oneself and everything;

the Dharma Treasure, all of the teaching that helps us take refuge in the Eternal; the Sangha Treasure, which for me is the refuge of all those who are trying to live from the immaculacy, pure love, compassion, and nonjudgmental flow of the Eternal.

Now when I read Rev. Master's Commentary I can see that this Precept is not as easy to keep as I thought. Part of the Commentary goes, "Do not criticize the way of another, do not call it into question; look within it and see the Lord [Eternal]. Look with the mind of a Buddha and you will see the Heart of a Buddha." Also, "To criticize is to defame the Lord of the House [Eternal]." After reflecting on this Commentary I see that I must be much more diligent in honoring this Precept. And when I feel a critical attitude toward one of the Three Treasures come up in my training (which is usually criticism and being judgmental of other beings), I try to catch it and say to myself, "Don't go there!" and let it dissipate. And since I am part of the Sangha Treasure, when I am critical towards myself I also block the magnificent flow of the Eternal and suffering results.

I will end, as I often do my newsletter articles (and my dharma talks), by observing that training in this way is not easy. But I know from my own experience and that of longtime fellow trainees, that this way of spiritual training really, really works in helping us live a much more peaceful and loving life.