

## December 2019

Greetings!

It is that time of year again, so I want to wish everyone a very joyous holiday season. I know I say this every year but I will say it again – this time of year we can very easily let go of our training and meditation. It is a time when the allure of our habitual ways of avoiding dis-ease can be magnified.

There are two big ways we usually go. The way I used to go was to get very busy, scattered and be all over the place. Inevitably I would overdo it and get quite burnt out. This would be like pouring gasoline on a fire, since in this burnt out state I was much more likely to move into some other unhelpful habitual way of avoiding dis-ease.

The other way we tend to go is that we create a bubble of sadness. We mope about and get very negative. It is our training and meditation that lets the stillness, compassion, acceptance and pure love of the Eternal shine through, and as this happens we can see the bubble for what it really is – something of our own making with no basis in reality.

Also at this time of year I like to say thank you. First, I would like to thank those who edit and contribute to these emails. Without them the emails would not be possible. Thank you Rev Master Bennet, Allan Pober and Geoff Nisbet.

I would also like to thank all who have supported me. Without this support I would not be able to stay in Seattle. Some folks have asked how to get donations to me. So, I think I will use this end of year email to pass this on. Should you wish, the way to donate is to make a check out to “North Cascades Buddhist Priory”, and at the bottom of the check where we state the purpose, put “for Seattle Refuge”. The check should be mailed to me at: Rev Basil Singer, 2208 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave #404, Seattle, WA 98121.

For those who don't subscribe to the Serene Reflection Dharma Association newsletter (which I strongly recommend), I am reprinting below an article of mine that came out a few weeks ago. I have been told that it has been very helpful.

I hope you have a great new year.

Take care,  
With all my heart,

Rev Basil.

**Righteous Indignation=Suffering**  
**Rev. Master Basil Singer**  
**Seattle Dharma Refuge**

One aspect of the Zen term *koan* is “any spiritual barrier or fundamental question in one’s training which one needs to face, penetrate, clarify, and transcend...in Soto Zen the emphasis is on the naturally arising koans of everyday life.”<sup>1</sup> For many years I have been working on the koan of *righteous indignation* that arises in my daily life. In the years that I have been teaching in Seattle I have noticed that many others have this same “spiritual barrier or fundamental question” which needs to be “faced, penetrated, clarified, and transcended.” In this article I will examine aspects of *righteous indignation* and how we might work on this common problem.

First, let’s look at dictionary definitions of the terms. A definition I found for *righteous*: “arising from an outraged sense of justice or morality.” A definition for *indignation*: “strong displeasure at something considered unjust, offensive or insulting; anger or annoyance provoked by what is perceived as unfair treatment.”

When a feeling of righteous indignation arises because of perceived offenses or insults directed toward oneself, it could be called “*self-righteous indignation*.” Because it is the egocentric self that feels hurt, not our Buddha Nature, our True Self. For myself, I have always been sensitive to others who try to control me or act superior to me. The ironic thing is, when I get caught up in this attitude I become the same kind of person that I have a problem with. I get superior to these folks in my own way and my heart hardens towards them. In reacting this way I break the precept to “not be proud of yourself and devalue others,” not to mention the precept against anger. And as we know from experience, breaking precepts causes suffering.

A few years ago I had righteous indignation come up in a big way. I hardened towards some politicians and got quite angry with them. At the same time, I had an attitude that my spiritual practice is better than other forms. My meditation and mindfulness of the precepts helped me to catch myself and realize what I was doing. I called for the help of the Eternal in pure meditation, and by opening myself to Its nonjudgmental, purity, compassion, and immaculacy I was able to let go of this attitude and in turn move away from the suffering it caused me.

And it is our suffering that lets us know we’re going down the wrong road. The teaching says that as our spiritual dis-ease comes up, most of us habitually try to cure it with greed, hate (anger) and delusion. I have found for myself that it is a bit easier to see the suffering caused by greed: I always get in some kind of trouble (e.g., eat too much, get sick, do too much of something and get burned out). With hate-anger I get headaches and just feel lousy. Delusion can make it much harder to see the suffering because we think we are right and support it with strong and inflexible opinions. And this one-

---

<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note in [Roar of the Tigress, Vol. I](#), p. 14 Page number references in this article will be to this edition.

sidedness blinds us to seeing everything and everybody as having the True Nature, the Buddha Nature, the Eternal. Delusion is full of pride even when we don't see it, which I have experienced in myself after I am able to catch myself in this delusion. Also we really have to be mindful of this kind of self-righteous delusion because it can manifest at any time. I had it manifest towards my teacher and some friends at different times. I see in others how it can manifest with family members and spouses and partners. This delusion has caused much suffering for many.

What about righteous indignation that arises from seeing the suffering of others? It's interesting to me that, when inspired by the suffering of others, *righteous indignation* is actually based in a sense of *sympathy* and *empathy*. And as we train ourselves, that sense of sympathy and empathy becomes stronger and more painful. In one of her talks collected in *Roar of the Tigress, Vol. I*, Rev. Master Jiyu observes that

Any time someone, whether a lay member of the sangha or a priest member of the sangha, tries to do something about themselves they will find themselves burdened with other people's grief *unless they really know that they themselves are not the Cosmic Buddha* and that there is nothing in them that is not of the Cosmic Buddha.... The deeper we go into meditation, the more suffering becomes apparent, therefore the more important it is that our faith shall deepen and we shall learn to recognize the little golden moments that point the way to the Cosmic Buddha. We have to stop trying to hold on to being able to do something ourselves about that very suffering. For we can do nothing of ourselves, if "we" are in the way. If all we see is suffering, we ourselves are in the way. And if we are in the way, we cannot see the Cosmic Buddha working through it. This is a very, very hard lesson to learn. (223, my emphasis)

Suffering results for ourselves and others when we think *we know* what and who is "right," and what and who is "wrong." That is putting ourselves in the place of the Cosmic Buddha and thinking we understand the big picture when we really only have bits and pieces.

It turns out that Rev. Master Jiyu herself experienced righteous indignation early in her training. In another talk in *Roar of the Tigress* the topic is community involvement and someone says, "I have a difficult time deciding what the most compassionate action might be when I feel a lot of anger over things that are inflicted on people." And Rev. Master says,

I asked that question of the Kanin (the Director or Prior) of Sojiji, and I got mad as heck at him when he told me that the only answer, the only real answer, was all-acceptance and education. (230-31)

No doubt like many of us, she was decidedly unpersuaded by this answer. But she was a good trainee and

went off and I meditated on it and I thought about it. What other alternative is there? Yes, it's lousy, but unless there is constant work toward education and mutual acceptance on the part of all sides, it will remain lousy. Just killing people off, or putting people in jail or doing all this sort of forcing of things, is only going to make it worse, because it's going to make tempers get hotter; they're going to flare higher.... But acting out of anger or righteous indignation isn't the answer. It's just very sad, and acceptance and education really are the key. (231)

So how are we to respond to the suffering that hurts our hearts?

So many people feel that "getting into a flap" over something is to get involved in it, but it's not. To be truly involved is to be doing something wholeheartedly and yet to recognize one's own limitations. Not to try to do everything oneself, not to try to do the impossible, is to be concerned but not emotionally involved. Do not allow emotion to become the central theme of your life; do not be a slave to it. Emotion is important, but do not become emotional. There's nothing wrong with emotion—everyone feels emotion—but to become emotional is quite a different thing. To become emotional is to become so wrapped up in something that you can't see beyond it, and you can't really work with it. Not only can you not see beyond it, you can see no way out, 'round, or under it. And then you go into anger or despair because of it. Frequently, people are so overwhelmed by what is going on that they cannot see beyond it, and that is called "to become emotional" in Buddhism. (226)

Actions precipitated by emotionalism tend to be thoughtless and impulsive, and usually leave behind them a karmic "wake." As Rev. Master says, we must recognize our own limitations, and one of the best ways is to be mindful of the influence the emotions have on our actions of body, speech, and thought. Since acting on emotional impulses tends to break precepts, keeping the precepts in mind really helps us catch ourselves before acting impulsively.

This world is not a perfect place. *And* we can find true Perfection when we can perceive all seeming imperfections as Perfections—in other words, when we can recognize the Immaculate Flow of the Eternal in everything. When we live in this place we can let righteous indignation dissipate within this cleansing flow, and we can move from suffering into peace.