

October 2020

Greetings!!

I hope all are doing well and that you have settled in and transitioned to the "new normal" with acceptance. I know how difficult these times are for many with their livelihoods affected and restrictions on activities resulting in them not being able to do the things they love. One important aspect of the acceptance of current circumstances is to simply get on with doing what needs to be done. Acceptance really helps us in our efforts to keep looking up.

I have been doing more things lately. I have been doing "window visits" at the assisted living/nursing home. The Saturday virtual meditation group is going nicely and I have joined Rev Master Bennet's virtual group on Wednesday's. The detention center is still closed to visitors.

I have been closing up the roof garden for the season. I picked the last of the tomatoes and beets. I will miss the garden till next spring.

For all those who don't subscribe to the Serene Reflection Dharma Association newsletter I would like to reprint an article I recently wrote.

With all my heart,
Rev Basil

Fearing the Future Rev. Master Basil Singer Seattle Dharma Refuge

Few would disagree that we are living in difficult and turbulent times. One reaction to current circumstances that I have experienced, as have others I have talked to, is fear and worry about the future. For myself, this reaction comes up in waves, while some people are practically consumed by it.

This reaction of worry and anxiety is quite understandable when so many aspects of our life in the world—and the physical world itself—is in accelerated change. Polarized politics, pandemics, economic uncertainty, global warming...the list goes on, with modern media technology inundating us with "the sky is falling" news 24/7 (if we let it).

It is very hard not to get caught up in a cycle of worry and despair, which easily leads to lashing out with opinionation and judgmentalism, which naturally result in suffering for ourselves and others. This is why our training in meditation and the Precepts is so

vitaly important right now. Our meditation puts temporary, passing events in perspective by uniting us with That Which is Unborn and Undying. When we open our hearts and release our grip on worry and anxiety and fear, we allow the cosmic love and compassion that is the True Reality of everything to flow into the spaces they took up. As we go about our daily lives, then, we can recall that Reality when we begin to be overwhelmed by negative thoughts and emotions and return to the still center of our True Self. And mindful application of the Precepts helps us stay centered there and not be pulled into the cycle of fear.

In some circumstances an experience of fear and anxiety can be a helpful little “niggle” telling us that there is something we need to pay attention to, some action we should take. For example, I was once in a park in New York when I had fear and worry arise. I looked ahead and saw a group of guys clearly looking for trouble. I turned around and went the other way, and likely avoided a confrontation that probably would not have turned out well for me. So, rather than be immobilized by fear and anxiety, or lashing out impulsively, we can be still in our True Place and ask ourselves, “What’s good to do in this situation? What will be best for self and other?”

Another experience I had serves as a metaphor for living in a turbulent world. I was on a boat sailing from Italy to Greece. We hit a big storm, and the boat was really thrashing around. I was up on the deck in really bad shape with seasickness. In an example of the compassion and sympathy always present in the world, one very kind member of the staff came up to me and said he could help. He took me below decks, near the centerpoint of the boat where the rolling was less extreme. He told me to sit down and relax if I could. This was a big help and my sickness dissipated. In the context of fear and anxiety for the future, relaxing into that still and centered place in ourselves transports us from the distressing edge of our wildly thrashing emotions to a place of stillness and equanimity.

I will close with a simple but enormously helpful teaching that I have heard many times as a layman and a monk: “Do not regret the past, do not fear the future, live now without evil”—live now without acting in ways that cause suffering for self and others. When we live that way moment-to-moment, our future will unfold with peace and equanimity and we will be a beneficial and stabilizing presence in a turbulent world.