

## July 2022

Greetings!

I just came back from my twice postponed trip back east. It was really great to see my family and friends. I was quite careful and I took a few different masks. On my return I found that the roof garden was looking great, and I thank my neighbors for watering and eating the strawberries that I offered them.

On my travels I noticed that folks are still getting very angry and stirred up about things and other people. I explained to them that whenever your heart hardens and closes you cause yourself suffering. Instead, what helps when anger arises is to be still for a bit and to let it dissipate and be washed by the love of the Eternal. We are human and anger will come up, but we don't want to let it consume us.

Attached to this email you will find two articles from last month's Serene Reflection Dharma Association newsletter. I wrote one and the other was written by Geoff Nisbet, one of the editors who assists me. I hope you find these articles helpful.

Take care. With all my heart,

With bows,  
Rev Basil

### **IMPERMANENCE**

Rev. Master Basil Singer  
Seattle Dharma Refuge

Early in my training I had difficulty understanding and accepting a particular teaching that I heard. That is, the teaching that is often expressed as, "this world and all that is in it is not, in essence, 'real'." I think my initial response was typical of many people on first hearing this. I thought, "My pain sure feels 'real,' and on the other hand, so are the things and activities that give me joy and pleasure. And my family, friends, and everything around me feel pretty real to me. How can you tell me that they are not 'real'?? That does not make sense!"

Over the years I have seen others react to this teaching in a couple of ways. One way is to say, "Since 'life is not real,' we may as well 'eat, drink, and be merry' and do anything we want and live a life of hedonistic self-indulgence—forget Precepts and laws that hinder our self-gratification." An opposite response is thinking that since things are not real, there is no purpose or meaning to life and despair is the only reasonable response. Suffering is built into these opposites. In just a superficial practical sense, the first opposite leads to a life of getting into trouble around every corner; in a deeper sense, and whether we acknowledge it or not, breaking Precepts causes suffering for ourself

and others, and that hurts deep in our heart, however much we might deny it. The other opposite leads us to a life of looking down with a cynical and negative attitude.

Also early in my training I was given a piece of advice that was crucially helpful for me in relating to this and other difficult teachings. That advice is: “If anything in the teaching does not sit right with you, put it on the ‘back burner’ and let it ‘cook.’ You do not have to believe it, but do not reject it out of hand. With time and training, it may clarify for you.” And that is what I did with the “unreality” teaching. Since there were plenty of other teachings I could accept, I just got on with my training.

Eventually, something “clicked” about this teaching that helped me to get a handle on it: it is an aspect of the teaching on impermanence. To say that this world is “unreal” is to point out that everything in it that seem so solid and lasting to our senses and emotions—things and people, sorrows and joys—are actually transitory and ephemeral. If we seek our identity in relation to them—if we take ultimate refuge in them as a permanent sanctuary—we will suffer because they will be taken from us...by death, if not before.

But that is not the whole story. The Buddha taught that there is an “Unborn, Undying, Uncreated, Unformed”—a Reality unconditioned by time that we can take refuge in; a Reality radiant with stillness, compassion, love, and wisdom. Rev. Master Jiyu called this “the Eternal.”

A metaphor came up for me that really helped me to understand this teaching of the Real within the unreal. I once bought some pineapple juice. When I got it home and read the label, I saw that it was only twenty-five percent actual pineapple juice and the rest were ingredients like water, sugar, and vegetable juice. I got to thinking: Even if this is not 100% “real” pineapple juice, when I drink it I am still taking in a measure of pure juice. It occurred to me that, within this mixed-up existence of unreal and impermanent things—greed, hate, delusion, pain, pleasure, despair, joy...—there is the pure and lasting Reality of the Eternal’s compassion, love, and wisdom and That is what nourishes my life.

To live keeping one’s heart open and pure, looking up spiritually and seeing the Eternal in everything, doing one’s best to keep the Precepts which helps with that seeing—this is the teaching I have always understood and have been working on for many years. This has helped me so much in my life and I have an enormous amount of gratitude for teachings and guidance I have been blessed with over the years.

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## The Eyes of Faith

Geoff Nisbet

One viewpoint that seems to me quite prevalent in today's society is what one might term "scientific materialism". Understandably, people are impressed by the brilliance of modern science. So many of the material things we take for granted would not have been possible without it, modern medicine is dependent upon it, and it is also a powerful explanatory tool. A recent example is that it has allowed us to understand how COVID is transmitted and to develop the vaccine that helps prevent the spread.

Impressed by its power, many well-educated people appear to have opted to make science the thing upon which they rely. I have read and heard many people say that particular decisions they are making are "evidence-based". Science is seen as *the* way to understand the truth of things, and there certainly seems to be some logic to this given how successful the scientific understanding has been over and over again.

From this viewpoint, religion is often regarded with extreme skepticism or even ridicule. It is sometimes vaguely equated with pre-scientific explanations of things that science has shown to be mistaken, explanations that may seem silly and without any empirical basis, from a modern, scientific perspective. How could a well-educated modern person possibly believe in such nonsense? Furthermore, there's no scientific evidence for the existence of God, so why would I believe in one?

One might feel that this scientific materialism has all angles covered – everything I believe will be based upon solid evidence, and verifiable fact. What need is there for anything else?

And yet, there is one cast iron certainty that does not sit so well with this viewpoint. That is, the certainty of my own death. If my viewpoint is purely materialistic, where on earth do I turn at the time of my death? At this point, I can hear a materialist objection – "yes, death is disturbing, and religion, God, has been created as a comfort to deal with this disturbing thought. Just because we want there to be a God to make ourselves feel better that doesn't make it true that there is one. Show me the evidence?"

But what if religious truth can only be seen when an entirely different set of eyes is opened? And that, it seems to me, is exactly how it is; and it is faith that enables these eyes to open. Faith allows us to directly connect to the Something that is greater than ourselves; the immanent, transcendent, magnificent Something that is the reality of all things. Faith creates the initial gap that lets some light through the lattice-like structure of our own opinions. Faith prompts us to follow a practice that will slowly transform our view of how things are.

The problem for the skeptical mind is that in religion the faith needs to come before the evidence. The skeptical mind insists that it will not believe in something greater unless it is provided with some evidence. But, by closing itself off to even allowing the possibility that there could be such a “thing” it ensures that the meditative eye remains shut, for the eyes of meditation depend upon the openness and depth that can only come when we connect to our True Nature in faith. And so the skeptical mind remains blind to religious truth and convinced that there is no such thing.

My experience is that as we put faith into practice on an ongoing basis (by doing Buddhist training), the “evidence” manifests naturally in our lives, there grows a quiet confidence that there is an Unborn, Undying, Buddha Nature, and the whole body of Teaching starts to make sense.

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