

December 2023

Greetings,

I would like to wish everyone a very joyous holiday season and a very happy new year. At the end of the year I like to express my gratitude. First, I would like to thank those who have supported me throughout the year with very kind donations. Without their support I would not be able to stay in Seattle and do what I do. Second, I would like to thank those who edit and contribute to all that I write. Without them I wouldn't be able to do these emails. I would especially like to thank Rev. Master Bennet Laraway, who has been a major help. His knowledge of Buddhism has been greatly appreciated.

For all those who would like to offer their support, the way to do it is to make a check out to "North Cascades Buddhist Priory", and at the bottom of the check, where one states the purpose, put "Seattle Dharma Refuge". The check should be mailed to me: Rev Basil Singer, 2208 2nd Ave #404, Seattle, WA 98121.

I have attached an article I wrote that appeared in a recent newsletter of the Serene Reflection Dharma Association.

With all my heart,
With bows,

Rev Basil

Striving for Perfection Leads to Suffering

Rev Master Basil Singer
Seattle Dharma Refuge

Recently I have been asked about "being perfect" in training and how we can achieve it. I believe that this question is based on a misunderstanding of the saying, "the perfection of Zen." The question itself reveals that, without realizing it, people default to what the dictionary defines as perfection: "make (something) completely free from faults or defects, or as close to such a condition as possible." Right away we can see that this orientation is setting us up for suffering, because it is creating ideals of perfection that, being human with faults and defects, we can never attain.

The *Sandokai* teaches that we "compound delusion by following ideals." Delusion arises when we believe we are separate from the Eternal, and this false sense of separation arises when we think we do not achieve some set of ideals that would unite us with the Eternal. The purpose of training is to help us unblock our self-judgmentalism and live in the flow of the love and compassion of the Eternal.

We do not begin life with a set of "ideals"—they are conditioned into us by our family and culture and our religious indoctrination. In an article on the *Sandokai*, Rev. Master Jiyu wrote, "We are sensitive to the Cosmic Buddha as babies, but we are carefully educated out of that sensitivity." The longing for that harmonization with the Eternal never goes away, "So we are striving to get back to

the Cosmic Buddha, but all we can come up with are ideals.”

We train because our True Heart longs for reunion with the Eternal, but our egocentric self gets in the way because it operates from a place of separation. And this ego-blockage often manifests as *fear*: fear that if we do not “get it right,” then we will lose the love of both man *and* the Eternal. Some examples for training might be: “I *must* meditate X number of hours a day; I *must* sit cross-legged on a cushion—no matter how painful— for ‘authentic’ meditation; I *must* do everything perfectly in ceremonies or other trainees will think less of me...”. Usually the *must* we impose on ourself is an idealized striving for an undefined perfection that we cannot meet. And when we inevitably fail to meet the high standards we have imposed on ourself to be a “good trainee,” we feel depressed and disheartened and think, “I’m not good enough to do this training, why bother?” Ego wins.

Note what is missing in all this striving: a heart that is open to the Eternal; a heart that says, “I cannot do this alone, please help!”—A heart that surrenders its grasping, closed-fisted, ego-based *willfulness* and becomes open-handed *willingness*. Striving is prideful effort. Right Effort is imbued with humility: “I am not perfect, and I do not know what perfection is, but I *do* know this longing to be one with my True Self, and I know that this training will help me.”

All this is not to say that we need not do our best in training. In another article Rev. Master Jiyu wrote, “No one expects you to become perfect but there is room for improvement in all of us.... But perfection is something at which we work, it is not something that we can ever completely achieve—hence there is nothing but endless training for the trainee, and no one ever says he is either enlightened or not enlightened—he just goes on in his endless training, doing the best he can.”

Ultimately, it is our *practice* of Zen—our training in meditation and the Precepts—that opens us to realize the perfect compassion, love, and wisdom of the Eternal. And since the Eternal manifests in everything, we see Its purity in everything, including our own humanity.