

The Buddha teaches us that *“With the relinquishing of all thought and egotism, the enlightened one is liberated through not clinging.”*ⁱ

By following his sage advice, one could end a discourse on cutting links of the chain of dependent-origination fairly quickly, but unfortunately most people are “cursed” with what some refer to as *“the illusion of our individual separateness,”* and have yet to embrace the knowledge of the union one’s mind has with the whole of nature.

It is interesting to follow teachings as they are brought to other religions. One finds a similarity between working backwards through the links of dependent origination, as Buddha did to free himself from their bonds, and teachings of Meister Eckhart. It was Eckhart who offered these instructions for merging with God... with our Buddha nature... with the divine consciousness:

*But how does one know and love such an unnameable and unknowable God? By letting go or detaching oneself (Abgeschiedenheit) from all images. “God is not found in the soul by adding anything, but by a process of subtraction. This “process of subtraction” allows us to make contact with the oneness and simplicity that is our knowledge of God, a God already deeply present in us. In this way we make contact with the non-God who is a not-mind, not-person, not-image.”*ⁱⁱ

These admonitions to still the mind are echoed in the words of Dzigu Kongtrul Rinpoche during a discussion of the three jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha in Nepal: *“Obtaining Buddhahood is*

a natural phenomena; one's path is blocked by one's own negative emotions, by one's own ignorance." And it is this very "ignorance" which is the first link of the chain of dependent origination. Rinpoche further stated that this ignorance gives rise to the sensation that "things" are "solid."

And it is here that the path along the links of dependent origination begins, with this misconception that *"things are solid,"* for as we note from the teachings of The Second Dalai Lama:

*... the solid "I" which seems to exist somewhere within the body and mind is merely an imputation. This "I" cannot be located anywhere within any individual piece of the body and mind, nor is it found within the body and mind as a collection, nor is there a place outside of these that could be considered to be a substantial basis of the object referred to as the name "I."*ⁱⁱⁱ

It is possible we need to confront issues concerning "dependent arising" as "dependent imputation," for when the whole and parts of any particular object – the latter being that independence upon which the whole is imputed – appear to our minds, the whole appears to have its own separate entity and the parts appear to be its parts. They appear to our conceptual thought in this manner, but if they did, in fact, exist this way, you should be able to point your finger at a whole that is separate from its parts. One must cut the first link of dependent origination so that the successive links cannot then manifest.

Trungpa Rinpoche offers the following instruction for cutting this first link of dependent origination:

You must take away the watcher, the observer of the two extremes. Once the watcher is removed, then the whole structure falls apart. The dichotomy remains in existence only so long as there is an observer to keep the whole picture together... Once we take away the watcher, there is a tremendous amount of space because he and his bureaucracy take up so much room. If we eliminate the filter of “I” and “other,” then the space becomes sharp and precise and intelligent.^{iv}

Further, we need to examine the subtle difference between intellect and mind. The intellect does not know, can by its nature never comprehend or know a thing. The mind as a whole knows and comprehends it, in an eternal moment of time, at an infinite point of space. Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche clarifies the point succinctly, “*If one examines brain, one does not see one’s thoughts, so mind is distinct from brain.*”

So it would appear that conceptual thought, any thought for that matter, is the path to ignorance, which links one inevitably to the path toward samsara. Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, during a teaching in Nepal, said that “*thinking means attached,*” and that “*all we perceive is our own mind, magical illusions arising from dependent origination, but ultimately non-existent.*” His belief is that ignorance is our only “creator,” because through it everything evolves, and the opposite of this ignorance is “*awareness and knowledge which relaxes egolessness.*”

Chokyi Nyima solidifies our understanding of these teachings:

“as long as appearance that unfailingly arises as dependent origination and emptiness utterly free of association remain as two separate entities, we have still not comprehended the intent of the Buddha.”

It would appear from this discussion that thought, simple thought, is the prime suspect manifesting as the first link of dependent origination. Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche believes that “*thinking*” and “*having a thought*” are the same thing. But is it possible that “*not-thinking*” and “*having no thoughts*” is not the same? I believe so. For to not-think is to possibly have the awareness that one was thinking, now is not thinking. But to have no thoughts is simply that, to have no thoughts.

Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche discussed this concept as “*total freedom of any thought involvement.*” This was during a discussion of the threefold freely resting in view, meditation and perception. Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche offered this clarification:

To have “no thought” without awareness is what is known as “dullness non-thought”. But to be aware, yet having no thoughts arising is known as the natural state.

A key to absence of thought is not labeling our thoughts, because as Chokyi Nyima reminds us, “*you are attaching levels to a seeming gathering of parts, but this is a superficial entity, thus a superficial reality.*” Tulke Ugyen Rinpoche, in a related Nepal audience, furthered the examination of the origin of thoughts: “*It is foolish to teach*

someone to label thoughts as part of meditation training because it only keeps the mind in motion.”

Stilling the mind and furthering one’s practice through silent communion is essential. And the life of contemplation is inextricably interwoven with the life of compassion. The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others. This is the very essence of *Via Creativa*. Many search for the path to mental and emotional equilibrium, a balance of wisdom and compassion.

The path need not be particularly difficult and fancy. Maybe the path to awareness is as simple as embracing this reflection by Eckhart: *Dualistic consciousness is the ultimate sinful attitude that prevents our experiencing the union with being and with God... All dualism or opposition gives way to the light of wisdom wherein all is known in a unitive state of consciousness.*^v

And Trungpa Rinpoche explains how not allowing the first link to manifest and resting in a continual state of *rigpa*, or non-conceptual thought-free original wakefulness, is one vehicle to use on our path to this “*unitive state of consciousness*” as follows:

The Tibetan word for wisdom is yeshe, which means “primordial intelligence.” You are yourself at the beginning of any beginning. You could almost call it “unoriginated trust in yourself.” You do not have to find the beginning at all. It is a primordial situation, so there is no point in trying to logically find the beginning. It is already. It is beginningless.^{vi}

Maintaining a “beginner’s mind” places us in a mode to receive beautiful wisdoms and unusual insights. We come to understand the futility of searching for truths in the very tiny corners of our own province. There is no one pathway leading to spiritual fulfillment or serenity. Often one who speaks in reverential tones about his or her personal journey is actually more of a promoter than a seeker. God chooses us through a variety of means, and we do likewise with God. We all need to find a spiritual discipline that leads us to the natural state.

Non-belief and silence in relation to the divinity are often serious, legitimate and considered responses. One of our responsibilities is to remain lifelong explorers of the divine mystery. But this does not mean to enter into a life of perpetual religious questing. Our spirits would do well to slow down occasionally, cease chatter, listen and attune to the divine breath.

If we turn to, or cling to faith as a vehicle for examining and becoming in harmony with the divine mystery, we have removed ourselves from the very mystery we seek. Faith can sustain us through moments of light and dark. Faith can serve as a companion throughout our lives. Faith can be a constant comforter and partner... but true faith must know when to be silent and absent. For only then will we enter into a oneness with the “*unitive state of consciousness.*”

Meister Eckhart believes that when we are silent, it is then we can hear the Word of God:

Wherever the Word is to be heard, it must occur in stillness and in silence. We can not be of greater service to this Word that through stillness and silence. There we can hear it and understand it correctly, in that state of unknowing. Where we know nothing, it becomes apparent and reveals itself.^{vii}

It seems at times we pursue our thoughts without substantial reasons for doing so. Often our egos are tantalized into pursuing thoughts better left alone. But we must not lose sight of the true nature of our being, and if there is not any good reason for making a shift from the natural state, then we must stay put. We must maintain lucidity with relation to the natural state.

We pride ourselves on intelligence and complexity at times, but lucidity combats mystification, and foregoes the risk of purveying obfuscation and fogginess in our pursuit of God. Our goal should be clear, to create and maintain a constant relationship with the Word, what one might embrace as a *communion with compassion*. If we humans want to be in communion with the Word, one of the best ways to do so is through meditation. More precisely, our mission is to dwell in love, compassion and the Word, not merely remove ourselves from it through our thought process, only to pay an occasional visit. Dwelling in love, compassion and the Word means taking up residence there.

Saint Anselm is clear in his instruction on the importance of meditation, resting in the natural state: “...*flee, and conceal yourself before the storm of thoughts that also bring unrest to the soul.*”^{viii}

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- ⁱ Borg, M., Ed. (1997). Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings. Berkeley, California, Seastone, an imprint of Ulysses Press, P. 79.
- ⁱⁱ Fox, M. (1980, 2000). Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart. Rochester, Vermont, Inner Traditions International, P. 183.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Smith, J., Ed. (1997). Everyday Mind: 366 Reflections on the Buddhist Path. New York, New York, Riverhead Books, June 30.
- ^{iv} Trungpa, C. (1973). Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism. Boston, Massachusetts, Shambala Publications, Inc., P. 73-74.
- ^v Fox, P. 90.
- ^{vi} Trungpa, P. 109.
- ^{vii} Fox, P. 256.
- ^{viii} Ibid., P. 381.

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