

Living a Life That Matters

Lay Buddhist Practice/Lectures for Coastside Vipassana

Part III: Wisdom, Integrity, and Courage: The Best Season of our Lives

- I. **'Masters of the Universe'**
 - a. **Dogen's story of 'Bird's Nest Roshi':** *There was a Chinese Zen teacher named 'Bird's Nest,' who was called this because he lived up in a tree. There was a statesman and poet who was a student of Bird's Nest. And one time the statesman stood below his tree, called up to him and said, "Looks very precarious and dangerous up there," and Bird's Nest said down to him, "Looks very precarious and dangerous down there."*
 - i. **What is Bird's Nest trying to teach? What do we mean by dangerous? Perception and perspective**
 - ii. **After the volcano in Iceland Daniel Shore said, "We think we are 'masters of the universe', that we are in control until something like this happens. It's very humbling."**
 - b. **Bird's Nest makes a choice to live deliberately in this physically precarious and dangerous way, using it to point out our grasping desire for safety and comfort**
 - i. **Chris Doherty's blog:** *We want so much for everything to be under control. In our lives in the U.S. most of us are able to plan things in advance, to have an idea of what to expect. We want our jobs to go well, our lovers to behave the way we want. We go through all sorts of contortions to avoid the panic of not-knowing, the falling-off-a-cliff feeling of having to meet each moment as it comes without knowing what it will bring. We don't realize that not-knowing is the nature of things, and to live with intention in not-knowing is perfect freedom, because we never know what each moment will bring. We just think we do, and we're right often enough to solidify it into a delusion we cling to for protection against a world we think is separate from ourselves*
 - ii. **But that's how this life is: very precarious and dangerous to actually go about in the world because it's *not* under our control and we believe that we're separate from everything**
 - iii. **We forget we are totally connected to everything, so it's easy to get into causing harm and to forget about doing good; in our desire for control, we forget about the practice of wisdom that would end our suffering**

- II. Letting Go of Control and Fear: Developing wisdom**
- a. ***Five Qualities of Wisdom (NPR Interview with the elderly):***
Reciprocity (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you), Doubt/questioning, Discretion/Discernment, Patience, Social Conscience
 - b. ***Buddhist Qualities of Wisdom: The 4 virtues conducive to a layman's happiness according to Buddha***
 - i. ***Saddha* (faith/confidence)—in moral, spiritual and intellectual values**
 - ii. ***Sila* (morality)—abstaining from destroying and harming life (stealing, cheating, adultery, lying, addiction)**
 - iii. ***Dana* (generosity)—charity, generosity without attachment and craving for wealth**
 - iv. ***Prajna*(wisdom)—develop wisdom which leads to the complete destruction of suffering**
 - c. **Putting the two together**
 - i. ***Reciprocity* (doing unto others)=morality, patience, and generosity (as well as effort, right speech, etc.) contained in the Precepts, 8-fold path, and the Perfections**
 - ii. ***Social Conscience*=Compassion and the Bodhisattva ideal**
 - iii. ***Doubt/questioning*=Buddhist teaching method through stories, koans, and dharma inquiry**
 - iv. ***Discernment*=Wisdom, emptiness (seeing things as they really are)**

- III. Reciprocity: Wisdom and Morality**
- a. ***Metta Sutta (Buddhist sutra of morality, compassion, generosity):***
“This is what should be accomplished by the one who is wise, who seeks the good, and has obtained peace. Let one be strenuous, upright, and sincere, without pride, easily contented, and joyous. Let one not be submerged by the things of the world. Let one not take upon oneself the burden of riches. Let one's senses be controlled. Let one be wise but not puffed up and let one not desire great possessions even for one's family. Let one do nothing that is mean or that the wise would reprove.”
 - b. ***Prajna (Wisdom) is not only the chief perfection of the Six Perfections but, strictly speaking, the only Perfection***
 - i. **Generosity, Morality, Patience, Vigor and Meditation are not really perfections (*paramitas*) in the highest sense of the term**
 - ii. **Giving and the rest are like a company of blind men who cannot, without a leader, go along a path and arrive at a village, town or city. Only when laid hold of by the Perfection of Wisdom are they termed ‘perfections’, for then these five perfections acquire an organ of vision which allows them to ascend the path to all-knowledge.**

- IV. **Social Conscience: Compassion and Wisdom**
 - a. **Compassion and Wisdom**
 - i. **The Middle Way in where wisdom and compassion are inseparably linked**
 - 1. **Compassion (*karuna*) : love, charity, kindness, tolerance and such noble qualities on the emotional side, or qualities of the heart; represented by Avalokitesvara with 1,000 hands and eyes**
 - 2. **Wisdom (*prajna*): the intellectual side or the qualities of the mind; represented by Manjusri with delusion-cutting sword**
 - ii. **The wisdom of emptiness (no separate self) brings about a spontaneous release of compassion because once we see our total connection to everything, there is nothing to control and no reason to hold back**

- V. **Doubt: the Wisdom of Questioning**
 - a. **Buddhist teaching method**
 - i. **Self-revelation based on internal reflection and external debate rather than faith-based**
 - 1. **Buddha: “Forget everything I have taught you; be a light unto yourself and trust your own experience.”**
 - 2. **Questions may prove more important than answers**
 - ii. **Koans, teaching stories, public debates**
 - b. **Importance of Doubt**
 - i. **Great doubt, great faith**
 - ii. **The wisdom of courage: courage is not about being without fear or doubt; it is about going forward anyway**

- VI. **Discernment: Wisdom, Prajna, and Emptiness**
 - a. **Buddhaghosa on Wisdom/Prajna:**
 - i. **Has the characteristic of penetrating into dharmas as they are themselves, seeing things as they really are (i.e., the 3 Marks of Existence: Dissatisfaction/suffering, Impermanence, and Emptiness)**
 - ii. **It has the function of destroying the darkness of delusion (i.e., the three poisons of greed/thirsting desire, hatred/aversion, ignorance/delusion (of emptiness))**
 - iii. **It has the manifestation of not being deluded; because of the statement, “He who is concentrated knows, sees what really is,” concentration is its proximate cause (pointing directly to meditation as the way to arouse wisdom)**

b. The 3-fold Nature of Wisdom/Prajna

i. Digha Nikaya XXXIII:

- 1. 'Based on thinking': knowledge (or wisdom) which one has acquired by one's own cogitation, without having learned it from others**
- 2. 'Based on Learning' (literally 'hearing'): knowledge which one has learned ('heard') from others**
- 3. 'Based on Meditation': knowledge which one has acquired through 'mental development' in this or that way, and which has reached the stage of attainment-concentration; *prajna*, the understanding of emptiness, is of this 3rd kind, based upon meditation**

VII. Lay Practice

a. What is needed to 'live a life that matters':

- 1. Determination and Effort**
- 2. Compassion, Acceptance, Forgiveness**
- 3. Wisdom, Integrity, Courage**

b. Poem on the back of my rakasu:

**Flowers in spring, the moon in autumn,
A cool breeze in summer, snow in winter.
If your mind isn't clouded by unnecessary things,
This is the best season of your life.**