

## COMPARED TO WHAT?

October 21, 2013

By Michael Erlewine ([Michael@Erlewine.net](mailto:Michael@Erlewine.net))

One of my favorite jazz tunes is the incredible Eugene McDaniels song "Compared to What?" sung by Les McCann, with Eddie Harris on sax. For those of you have the time, here is the original tune recorded live at the 1969 Montreux Jazz Festival. Wait for the lyrics please... especially the punch line:

"Tryin' to make it real – compared to what?"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzvlivbptXk>

That line is pure dharma to my ears because until we have some realization, we have nothing to compare our experience to. I had planned to move on to some other topics that I find interesting, but some of your questions suggest that I am not being clear enough with my presentation. For that I apologize, and we will take this sidebar. Someone asked a very fair question: "Do we not experience a realization?"

This suggests that realization is just another experience. To begin with, we have lots of spiritual experiences, but the realization I am talking about here, which the Tibetans call "Recognition," only takes place just once. Of course, there are exceptions to this and recognition can (and usually has to) be deepened, but in general, at least in the literature I have access to, it only happens once because it is a realization and not just an experience that comes and goes. That makes it something of a big deal.

And let me remind us what that recognition pertains to, which is the realization or recognition of the true nature of the mind, as in: how the mind actually works.

Of course, in our normal life we have loads of understandings, experiences, and simpler realizations. For example, I can experience a crowd of people coming toward me, but recognize your face in the crowd. I am experiencing the crowd moving toward me with all those faces, but I realize one of those faces is you. This too is a realization (recognizing you), and shares the same nature as "Recognition," but it is not the realization we are talking about here.

There is an absolutely easy way to solve this question and to know whether you have experienced the true nature of the mind. It may seem kind of harsh at first, but it was a great help to me in managing my own tendency to embroider my experience. If you

wonder if you have experienced the recognition of the true nature of the mind, then you have not. Or, if you want it to happen again or more, then you have not. Those kinds of questions are earmarks of experience, but not of recognition. Experience is relative. Recognition (realization) is of another kind, absolute and instantaneous.

In general, Buddhism does not make many hard and fast distinctions as to levels or states that a student is in. Usually everything is graduated and gradual. But "Recognition" is an exception, and just another example of how kind Buddhist principles are. Many students of Tibetan Buddhism (myself included) tend to mistake intellectual understanding for realization or, in this case, recognition. For one, we would like to believe that we have recognized the nature of the mind because we have had experiences where we glimpsed something and what else could it be?

Gradually we insinuate or grandfather ourselves into recognition because we have been around so long and have practiced so diligently, that kind of thing. But I find that the lamas are clear and draw a very hard line between having had and not having had "Recognition," and there is a reason for that.

Recognition marks the end of looking outside ourselves for guidance and the beginning of our guiding ourselves. Remember that Shakyamuni Buddha did it all by himself, and so will each of us have to do the same. Many, many texts make it clear that the sole responsibility of the dharma teacher is to point out the true nature of the mind and have the student get it. After that the student is on his or her own. They can see how to do it themselves, and the basic responsibility of the teacher is complete. The Zen Buddhists can be even more emphatic about recognition, which they call Kensho or Satori.

It is not helpful if the student learns all the appropriate dharma lingo and mixes that with mere intellectual understanding to come up with a concoction of their own and believe that they have recognition of the mind's true nature when they do not. It is the teacher's responsibility to prevent that, if possible.

Perhaps the greatest sign of recognition is that finally we have enough. It is what we need and have been waiting for all along in order to really practice, not the enlightenment we imagined we were going to get, but the actual means to achieve that.

With Recognition we have all that we need to really start on the path to enlightenment. Before recognition, one does not have this sense of ever having enough insight. We are still looking forward to it. With recognition we are finally satisfied that we have all that we need to practice on our own and to be fully involved. And practice becomes joyful because we are no longer just practicing, but actually now meditating. Our instruction is

complete. We are empowered.

After Recognition it is now up to us alone, and we know that we now have what we need to go on from here all by ourselves. I am reminded of the song sung so well by Billie Holiday, "God Bless the Child" that's got his own. With recognition, we finally have our own. We have enough.

I hope this is clear.

