

DHARMA -- PRESENT PERFECT

[News Notes: A rare treat this morning. Margaret and I sitting here in my office in Big Rapids, Michigan listening to a live broadcast of my daughter May Erlewine (and her trio with PG George and Charlie Muench) on the BBC from London. They interviewed May and she sang a couple of songs. How sweet!]

Trying to recover from a stroke has some very clear similarities to learning Insight Meditation and the Mahamudra practices. One of the goals of Mahamudra meditation is to rest in the present moment, which is non-dualistic. The only difference is that with a stroke you have no choice but to be in the present, at rest or not, so the problem there is getting used to the present, not reaching it.

The thing is that the Self is all about attachments and fixations. When something like a stroke strikes, the first thing it does is kill off any desire and attachment, thus suspending our fixations, at which time the Self self-destructs because our attachments are the glue that hold the Self together. Without attachments, the “Self” disincorporates, leaving us holding the present with no references. It just deconstructs.

What remains is “us,” stripped of our attachments (Self) out there standing in the naked Present, a place which we are not used to. Now the irony is that this state (or something close to it) is exactly what budding meditators learning the Mahamudra practices are trying to achieve, but in the case of stroke, we came in the back door – grandfathered in.

While the meditator wants to be in that present moment, the average stroke victim does not, because they feel stripped of everything they associate as their Self, including loss of the sense of past and future. So, there is a silver-lining for stroke victims, if they can relax and appreciate it. I don't encourage you to run out and have a stroke and I'm glad there is not a pill you can take to have one. LOL.

Yet, it was for me a mind-blower that after my second stroke I realized that what I was experiencing was not just a bunch of stroke-medical stuff, but simply my mind without a Self or close to it. As a student of meditation I found this amazing.

And aside from struggling to recover, I am at the same time, taking careful notes during this opportunity to tour my life without being chaperoned and prejudiced by my own Self.

The great Mahasiddha Tilopa in one of his classic “Six words of Advice” said “Don’t alter the present.” That’s clear enough. And by that he was saying that we can (should) be in the present without all of the elaboration of our conceptual, dualistic thinking. In other words, we should just rest in that eternal present, without attempting to alter it or any effort. And that’s exactly what Mahamudra practitioners do or attempt to do.

And that is what a stroke commits us to, ready or not. Not sure how a “non-meditator” experiences this, but I have been training in meditation since 1974 and, aside from being shocked by the event, I was amazed to find that there was nothing especially different that I could find from my years of mind training. The after-stroke-shock is still just the mind and the awareness was the same awareness we already have (and cannot alter). And, for sure, the Self is (if only temporarily) banished, vacated, or shattered, leaving this present moment in all of its nakedness and directness.

And, although at first I was a bit terrified by the sheer vacuity and emptiness of the present moment, after a few weeks I have become increasingly used to this state and have come to appreciate its directness and in particular purity. And that is purity compared to the old me, myself, and I. It so beats the elaboration of my historical Self, by having in the present one mind instead of the two minds of conceptual thinking.

For those of you who would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links:

http://traffic.libsyn.com/spiritgrooves/Links_to_Michael_Erlewine-V2.pdf

“As Bodhicitta is so precious,
May those without it now create it,
May those who have it not destroy it,
And may it ever grow and flourish”

