

THE SHOCK OF THE DHARMA PROTECTORS

[Continuing on with my health issues, but this blog is on how what I have learned affects my dharma practices and preparing for the bardo realms and rebirth.]

A strong health-event like a stroke can shatter the Self, but wipes out only so much, mostly the inessentials, what we commonly call the Self. When the Self is shattered and vacated, what remains is the actual nature of our own mind, which is inviolable. That nature cannot be altered or affected now or ever.

Yet, when we lose the personal grip on our Self, when it is vacated or shattered, we are kind of helpless until we reassemble or reanimate some functional persona or Self lineage. The Self is the habitual interface we have to the mind. It has taken me almost three weeks to get a handle on my stroke, which means to get enough of a self back to function well. That is more than just a bit of a hiatus. LOL.

And the problem with the Self throughout the stroke was one of simple misdirection, but don't imagine finding the proper direction is easy. In trying to hang on to what I call "myself," I was too focused on the past (constantly checking to see if it was there) and trying to recover what I could of it; I was not aware enough of the present. This was my big mistake. In the long run (or any run) the present moment is the only way to recover or recreate anything, so my fixation on checking-on and salvaging the past was futile -- misdirection. LOL.

This flattening of my user-profile (I.e., the shattering of the Self) has got to be similar to what happens in the bardo after death. The pith teachings all clearly say that we leave the Self behind at death and find ourselves increasingly coping with the bardo without a Self, so to speak -- up the creek without a paddle. The logic in the dharma teachings is crystal clear, but it is convenient to ignore the reality.

In the training for the realization practices, we are told over and over again that a sudden surprise, gunshot, car horn (almost anything) is an excellent opportunity and time to look at the nature of our mind, because in that moment of surprise or shock, we might just get jarred out of our fixations enough

to see the mind's nature. That's the concept and it's traditional.

Any great shock, like a death of a loved one or any shocking event, can be enough to throw us out of our habitual fixations and attachments so that in that moment or time we might see the nature of our own mind.

A shock such as a stroke (or whatever) is capable of devastating the Self, thus clearing or unveiling the mind for what could be an extended time; and this too has to be just another form of how the nature of the mind can appear or be seen without the normal amount of fixation or attachment. Health-events are nothing that special or different. They follow the same trajectory.

The takeaway for me here was to realize that the mind with the Self shattered, vacated or removed, (even curbed) is like seeing an eclipse of the Self.

Up until now, I had liked to imagine death and entering the bardo to still be with the full use of the Self. And this, even though all of the texts say we have to check the Self at death's door or that it is phased out very soon after death. I heard that, but I never really heard it. The Self does not accompany us beyond death except perhaps for a short way. That needs to be registered by readers.

Having experienced the eclipse of the Self during my recent stroke (and once before) did NOT leave me with the sense there will be the facileness of a Self at death as our primary interface and, to the degree the Self persists, would only succeed in further obscuring the true nature of the mind. The Self after death is only an obstacle.

Let's face it. As sentient beings, we speak the language of the Self, with all of its clinging, fixation, and attachment – positive, negative, and neutral. That's almost all we know and are familiar with. We are not familiar with the nature of the mind WITHOUT the Self as our interface and interpreter. My dear friends, to me this concept is stunning.

What it means (as I see it) is that what I have just experienced through my recent stroke-event is the coin of the

realm in the bardo and not an anomaly, and unless we have thinned out and very much cleared our Self, we will never see the true clarity of the mind's nature and thus we will be unable to best guide ourselves to rebirth.

Others have told me that they understand the Karmapa or some great holy being will appear in the bardo and guide us to safety. I cannot say if this is true or not because I don't know. About all I can say is: don't count on that and thus not prepare your mind for the bardo. I'm sure I have been guided in my life by great beings, but mostly I have seen progress when I turned the wheel of my own dharma. My point is: don't rest on your laurels.

As the pith teachings point out, "don't prolong the past" and "Don't invite the future," so we can't reference the past or the future, but only the present and even then we are told not to alter the present. We are a child of the present moment and whatever we have at hand is what we have. All the references, conceptualization, and elaboration in the world won't help. We each have to submit ourselves to reality.

The Self, while inconsequential (as in: impermanent), is still necessary, meaning it is necessary for us to have some self or interface to the nature of the mind. It's conventional, if nothing else. At least, at present, that's the only language we speak: the Self. So, from such a shock as can break out (via a stroke, etc.), it may be easier to build a new, more streamlined, Self than it is to carry out the obligations of our past self that we are so addicted to -- our history of fixations.

To be severed suddenly from my past, as in my recent stroke, was stark and austere. As I like to say, I am like a stranger in a strange land. This is NOT familiar territory.

IMO, we need to take that sheer starkness to heart, turn ourselves away from the past or future (and any imagined loss of our Self), and keep our awareness peeled on the present moment. From that association (with the present moment) and our diminished or uninflated Self, we can perhaps fashion a new, more aerodynamically-sound, Self, one that is more the interface a Self should be, meaning as low-profile as possible. This could actually aid us in negotiating the bardo and future rebirths by not obscuring our

mind.

To repeat: from what I have just gone through, dexterity or flying without a Self (so to speak) is very much more difficult than I had ever imagined it. In a word, I am totally addicted to my own B.S. and, as my kids say, that's true big time. How do we learn to let go of our fixations or attachments (with all their elaboration) and take the mind, as we might say, neat.

Right now, I am not even close.

[Photo taken by me of the Lion-Faced Dakini (Simhamukha), a wrathful female deity, a protector when obstacles arise. From our main shrine.]

“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”

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