

SELF-RETIREMENT

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It came as a bit of a shock when I first understand that I, as myself, you know... "Me" will never (not even ever) reach enlightenment. How disappointing is that!

The reason is that the 'self', as Buddhists know it, is nothing more than the sum total of our attachments, positive and negative, at best a kind of general secretary for our life, and not any kind of permanent 'being' or vantage point. The assemblage (montage) of what makes up what we call our "self" changes as our interests change. Like an onion, the self has no permanent core. When we die, the self is gone, but the mind is not.

So I find the idea humorous that should I become enlightened, myself as I now know me won't be around to see it. LOL. In other words, the self can't be the natural vantage point it appears to be now from which to survey life as we become more aware. Why is that?

Because becoming aware of the true nature of the mind is concomitant with a thinning out and dissolving of the attachment to the self, the self largely being all our personal attachments, likes and dislikes, our personal scrapbook. Sooner or later, they all have to go (the attachments, not what we are attached to), and with it goes the hope of somehow carrying the self as we know it on to the next world or life. In other words, as we become more aware, the self becomes increasingly transparent and less and less important as a refuge. We discover that it is not the "decider," and ultimately we gradually switch vantage points. We stop viewing everything from the point of view of our self. We stop being "selfish," because we discover it is an exercise in futility.

This is not to say that we should not have or will not still have a self when enlightened, because the self is a practical personal secretary that we would have to invent if we did not already have one. Like a good secretary, the self is like a butler to something more important and greater than itself (no pun intended), whatever we could agree that is, awareness, enlightenment, or whatever. However, most of us did not set out in life to be our own secretary. The secretary does not usually run the whole show, but will if we let it. In a word, we are not just "ourselves," if that makes sense.

The point here is that, while the self is not about to dry up and blow away, the extreme emphasis and concern with the self (call it our selfishness) will soften and our awareness or extreme focus on it will shift away from that vantage point to something more encompassing, more natural. And again: let's not forget that the Buddhists point out that this cluster of attachments we call our "self" will not be traveling with us when we go, and advise us not to put all our eggs in that basket. Don't count on it

As I like to say, I reached a point in life where I just put my 'self' out to pasture to graze as we would an old cow, and I make sure it has enough hay and sunshine, but I have ceased to consider "myself" as the be-all and end-all authority of anything. At this point I can laugh at myself, at least a little. And the proof of the pudding is that I have begun to treat myself as I would treat any other person, with as much love, kindness, and compassion as I can manage.

However, I have been reminded (and more than once) by those around me, that perhaps I like

myself too much. But I just say that you perhaps don't like yourself enough. After all, the self is really harmless when seen for what it is. It is OK to like oneself, nothing to be ashamed of or to beat-around-the-bush about. We are free to like ourselves, and with no apologies, even if no one else does. And here is a little poem I wrote about just that:

ME AND YOU

The fact that,
I like 'me',
Does not mean,
I don't like,
You.

There is room,
For you,
In me.

And,
You can like,
You too.

You too,
Are,
Like me.

I like you too!

