

DHARMA -- OUR WORST ENEMY

I am sometimes asked what about how the lineage and dharma path I am on differs from other forms of Buddhism, other paths. Of course, there are said to be 84,000 different dharmas and the teachings say that is just a big number; and they go on to say that there are many more paths than that. Where I find folks stumbling a bit is summed up by the great Mahasiddha Tilopa in this quote:

“This intrinsic and innate wakefulness,
Remains at the heart of all beings.
And yet, it is never perfected,
Without being pointed out by a master.”

And the question that comes up is one I too asked quite early on. I was certain that I could find my way to recognizing the true nature of the mind on my own. I didn't need a guru or master-meditator to point it out for me. If it was there, I would find it. Of course, back then I did not have an authentic dharma teacher. LOL. Pretty much, I was just whistling in the dark.

Well, unfortunately that attitude (and a ticket) would get me a ride on the bus, so to speak. Yes, I did my damndest to figure it all out, but what I came up with was basically a patchwork quilt of concepts, one filled with gaping holes. There was some continuity, but not enough to realize the nature of the mind I was struggling with. There finally was no doubt in my mind that I was at sea.

And yet, over and over again, I find in virtually all the pith Mahamudra teachings the gist of the above quote, that without an authentic master we will not

(and cannot) recognize the true nature of the mind. This is what is written and taught. It is not that it is impossible to recognize the nature of the mind on our own, just that (according to the Samadhi Raja Sutra) it takes many aeons, sometimes three, seven, or thirty-seven incalculable aeons. Some sources say that an aeon is a billion years. I suppose that I could hope that I am at the end of those endless aeons, but odds are that I'm not. LOL.

It took me a long to grasp that such statements are not true because just these great lamas say them; these authentic teachers say them because they are true. Of course, I thought about that. I felt I was too busy or it was too messy to try and work with a teacher or I did not want to depend on the guidance of another person, etc. When it came to rationalization, I was skilled. I wanted to do it all by myself, and so on. All this because, in truth, I had not found an authentic teacher who was willing to work with me. And I had no idea what that might be like.

In truth, I was not rich enough in respect for myself to feel I deserved such a teacher. I could not afford it. At any rate, it was not permitted. I had not accumulated enough merit to have a life-teacher appear.

And so, like an umbrella that I held over my own head to avoid the rain of wisdom blessings, I was not even open or interested in working with an authentic teacher. I felt I had to remain independent of other people; otherwise I was (somehow) weak. This whole guru-thing seemed ickier than finding a life partner to marry and at the time I hadn't been able to do that either. LOL. I felt impoverished when it came to things that mattered.

Of course, all this ended the very moment I actually met my root dharma teacher. Gone! All I needed was someone whose teachings affected me so that they sunk in and I was able to actually learn from them. I love learning dharma. The imprint of learning is the proof of the pudding! And, mirabile dictu, this particular teacher was willing to work with me, warts and all! Under all my crap and rationalizing, that's all I was looking for. And I found it, but I actually had to look.

My point is that each of us might just check our settings once in a while to see if we are even open to finding an authentic dharma teacher. For years, despite my many words, at heart I was not open to having a teacher or thought one couldn't really exist. As they say, we often are our own worst enemy. So, it pays to see if the door is even open and before we try and walk through it.

[Photo by me.]

“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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