

BEING ALONE WITHOUT BEING LONELY

According to the Tibetans, “GOM,” their word for “Meditation” is translated as becoming familiar with our own mind. In most of the classic dharma texts, when it comes to meditation, we are told to seek a place of solitude. Mountain caves are often at the top of the list, somewhere far away from other people. This may be difficult to do in these modern times; I’m not just sure why. Caves still exist. We just don’t go there. LOL.

And this means being alone with ourselves in solitude. And “solitude” is being alone without being lonely. Loneliness is a disease, a neurosis and a bad habit. The Greek philosopher said it clearly ages ago: “Being alone is.” As beings, we have never been “not alone,” so the fear of being by ourselves is a trumped-up charge we levy at ourselves.

For me, better than getting away from other people is getting away from ourselves. That, my friends, is solitude, and is even more difficult for most of us than a mountain peak. LOL. And more lonely than the loneliest cave is this present moment and harder to get to, much less be able to allow ourselves to rest in.

I should know because, thanks to my recent stroke, I have had a crash-course in being alone in this present moment. And how I have hated it and done everything in my power to avoid it I’m only now beginning to realize. Because the stroke somehow managed to shatter and void-out my Self, like the old poem, I had nowhere to run to.

“I ran to the rock,
To hide my face.
The rock cried out:
No hiding place!

“The rock cried out,
I’m burning too,
And want to go to heaven,
The same as you.”

Well, yeah, that happened. I was stuck in the present- tense, with no access to my Self and all its comforts. I looked for it but find myself I could not. And you know I tried! I was stuck in the eternal present, up that creek without a paddle. And there I had to just tough it out; twist and turn as I might, I was hung out to dry.

Not able to find or feel like myself, all I had to protect myself from the raw-present was a desperate attempt to stay busy. When I was immersed in activity, keeping my head down, I was not aware of the void-of-Self emptiness of the present moment. However, as soon as I stopped being busy, I popped back up in the moment and had to endure its stark emptiness. And so, I did everything I could think of to keep busy (even cleaned the basement for a week or so!), anything but face the void-of-the-present moment, which

was for me at the time a wasteland, devoid of my familiar Self and its comfort. And no entertainment either! I was on my own.

Yet, at the end of every action, when I surfaced again, there I was, face to face with an empty mirror, empty even of my own reflection. How scary is that? It reminds me of what are called the “Spaghetti Westerns” of Sergio Leone like “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly” starring Clint Eastwood and with the incredible theme-song by Ennio Morricone, this one:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFa1-kciCb4>

That’s how I felt, like the “man with no name,” Clint Eastwood, standing out in the desert with this theme song resounding all around me. LOL. Until then, I had no idea how important, comforting, and cocoon-like my familiar Self had always been to me. I didn’t miss it until it was gone, so “don’t leave home without it” was my cry. And I found myself without it. It’s still true today, but I am getting used to it. And I am learning a lot!

One of the dharma refrains is “Take it to the path.” Well, with a stroke I had no choice but to take it to the path. The dharma became the path. I found out how intoxicated I was with my Self and how addicted I was to its entertaining me pretty much all the time. Sure, I could intellectualize about the Self being corrupt, but I had no idea that the reality was so mesmerizing. None. I do now and it’s terrifying! I was a kept critter, devoted to my self’s suckling me.

And worst of all is the realization that my Self addiction is 100% in opposition to the dharma. Those of us who complain (or wonder) why we don’t have more (or any) dharma breakthroughs need look no farther than to the Self and our dependence on it. There’s no room for anything else when we are plugged into sustaining the Self 24x7. Of course, hindsight is 20/20. Since my stroke wiped out my Self and its demand to be fed, I experience this lack of Self in real-time.

I get it now, but I still must figure out what to do about it. I am working on it. I will have to find my “man with no name” hat.

[Photo by me today of the Bleeding Hearts just coming into bloom. These flowers are not even open yet, but still tubular in sections.]

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.”

