

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

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I just returned from a three-day intensive dharma teaching, in this case the presentation and commentary on a "doha," which is Tibetan for a song of spiritual experience. In Tibet, folks have biographies just as we do here, but there is a difference. At least Buddhist biographies are not concerned with your personal life, your hobbies, and all of that. Instead they are all about your spiritual life, the inner changes you have been through and what you have realized from them. They are called Namtars, and amount to a spiritual biography, like what we might call a hagiography (of saints) here in the west.

Namtars frequently are not concerned with the precise sequence of events (grade school, high school, etc.), but only with your spiritual realizations. And they often include dohas, songs and poems of spiritual experience. Frequently dohas are sung rather than just spoken. I have heard them sung.

Anyway, at this last weekend intensive we went through, line by line, a doha or song of experience written by the great Tibetan lama Jomgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye called "The Song of Mahamudra." Our teacher, the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche presented each line of the doha, along with commentary as needed.

This particular doha was a concise explanation (pith instructions) for Mahamudra Meditation, considered in the Kagyu Lineage (the lineage I belong to) the highest form of meditation.

Was it hard to grasp? Of course, and some of it was over my head. Was it worthwhile? Very worthwhile, because at least a little bit of it sunk in.

I also came away from this weekend with the sense that I should do more to help beginners get started with meditation of one kind or another. I can do that and have run a dharma meditation center for over 25 years.

That being said, if any of you want instruction or have questions about basic meditation, you can comment here, message me on Facebook (privately), or send me an email (Michael@Erlewine.net). We can communicate, plus (if needed) I can phone you. When I was first learning meditation I found it very helpful to have someone with more experience to bounce things off of. I am glad to be of help.

Time is passing, right? There is no time like the present to start training the mind. Contact me. And now I'd like to introduce what I hope will be a series of useful blogs.

THE INTANGIBLES

Meditation training is still quite new in this country. We are just getting the word out, so most of the emphasis is on the actual physical meditation technique itself, the bare bones, but there is more. Aside from the basic physical technique, there are what I sometimes call the "intangibles" – everything else. There is so much emphasis on learning the basic techniques of meditation that these intangibles are usually ignored until later on down the line. The problem with this is that these so-called "intangibles" are not just supplementary add-ons -- afterthoughts. Quite the contrary, they are crucial to the success of actually learning to meditate properly. That's the rub.

We can chalk this up, as mentioned, to the newness of it all, but that does not change the facts. The actual physical meditation technique is clearly very tangible, cut and dried. There is a correct way to do it, the method, while the intangibles have more to do with intent, enthusiasm, and a few other concepts that are new to Americans.

However, if you read the Tibetan Buddhist sources, those texts are all about the intangibles, about our intent, aspirations, dedication, and the like. Somehow we have put the cart before the horse, perhaps because these other intangible factors are too similar (and might be mistaken) for what passes as "religious" considerations. I really can't say why they are not taught along with the basic techniques from the get-go.

After we have practiced the basic meditation technique of Shamata for a while, we begin to discover the value and accent on all of these more intangible considerations. So let's just cut to the chase and take a look at a few of them, starting tomorrow.

