

Reb's Greatest Hits
Question and Answer
Green Gulch Farm
January 14, 2007

Student C: I've been reflecting on bodhicitta, the thought of enlightenment, or the establishment of bodhi mind, and I wanted to hear how it fits in this conversation.

Reb: You know, generally speaking, we're interacting with the universe, the living and non-living universe, and sometimes we start interacting with awakened ones. When we're interacting with awakened ones, a special mind arises, called the mind, or cognition, of awakening. So that particular, special mind, which is very influential and encouraging to the practice, arises in communion with, from dancing with, Buddhas. Buddhas are everywhere all the time, but it isn't always the case that people have this cognition arise. We live in a world with lots of electromagnetic radiation, but the combination of our sense organs' availability and the radiation doesn't always give rise to, for example, the perception of color. The factors that determine what kind of cognition arises depend on our sensory readiness and capacity, and also on the intensity of the stimulation. Buddhas are in the world with us, but our mind's readiness to interact with them goes through changes, and the Buddha's intensity of relating goes through changes. Sometimes we're ready, the stimulation occurs, and this thought of wishing to realize awakening for the welfare of the world arises. It arises the same way as the other ones, but with a special stimulus, and a special type of openness.

To be open to Buddha is, again, partly to do with whether you've been studying your karma. If you've been paying attention to your karma, and able to be somewhat skillful in the process, that tends to make you more open to this communion with the awakened ones. If that communion is strong enough, this thing arises, which doesn't happen all the time to all living beings. But it can happen. And it can be cared for, after that.

Student J: I notice my stories have a kind of hierarchical structure...

Reb: That's a story too.

Student J: Yeah, that's a story too. I notice that the underlying themes of my stories seem to be less visible to me. It's easier to become a little more aware of, "Gee, right now I've got to impress someone," or, "Right now, I'm feeling kind of needy." I sense that somehow, if I can get underneath that, and understand more truly where that theme came from, that helps me to be aware of all the stories that come from it.

Reb. Right. Also what you just said is another cognitive construction. If you get into that, you'll start losing track of the practice.

Student J: So, I take it that what you're saying is, the point is to have a constant awareness of the story without trying to figure it out.

Reb: You have awareness of the story, and now you have this new mental construction called “figuring it out.” In other words, you got caught just now by this new, improved version of intention, called “I’d like to go deeper.”

Usually people are caught up with activity of mind. The mind is always trying to make sense of, or cope with, direct experience, and also the current stories. When I listen to people talk, I sense that they’re with the story, then they make up another story, which they get caught by. I see them getting dislocated from the creative process, just swept away by it: “This is a story, but figuring it out isn’t a story.”

Student J: Ah.

Reb: Did you say “Ah”?

Student J: Yes [laughter].

Reb: So if you’re aware it’s a story, that’s good: “This is provisional, this is a way of coping here.” Okay. But if you go on to say, “And now I’m going to figure it out,” you haven’t noticed that that’s a more subtle one. If you don’t get caught by that one, a more subtle one comes. More and more subtle versions are offered to those who understand the gross ones. So your reward for not getting caught by a gross story, is a more subtle story.

Student J: So you’re saying it’s inherently frustrating to do this? [laughter]

Reb: No, it’s not inherently frustrating, but it is essentially liberating. If you want to be good at it right away, that would be frustrating. So telling stories is okay if you let go of them. That’s happiness-- telling stories and letting go.