

Quietism is a mental attitude characterized by a belief that the undertaking of any religious practice or training, other than when we are moved from within to do so, is to mask the essence of religion and one's life behind dogmatism and ritualized actions. Such an attitude reasons that whatever one feels or thinks, by impulse or design, is given from the Buddha Nature or Holy Spirit, and one only need practice when so inclined.

This attitude emerges, inevitably, from the selfish mind, whenever a person tries to change, or even seriously considers the state he or she is in. As such it is the manner in which our status quo of greed, hate, and delusion maintains itself against the urge to self-discipline. The people usually crippled by such an attitude are those who have attempted to find something 'more' to life. Either through inadequate means such as drugs, or lack of direct contact with a teacher, they have been caught within this half-truth. For the great spiritual problem of this attitude, and those who entertain it is that it is half-right in its basic assertion: 'God is Love' or 'All is One' and all things are contained herein. The implications drawn from this, That I, as I am - a child of God or son of Buddha - am perfect and by acting as I feel will necessarily manifest the truth, lead to spiritual misfortune in the stiffening of self will. Such an assertion attempts to solve the spiritual anguish that mankind feels simply by ignoring and suppressing its mental signs. Rather than solving the koan of 'something more', one has become satisfied with the assertions of other's.

Taken on a deeper level, this attitude answers that simply to look and see the koan within ourselves and our daily life is sufficient. There is no need then, to actively do anything about it as the right choice will manifest itself. A trainee who falls into such an error is lucky in that he is in a situation where he will be driven mercilessly until he sees through the delusion he has built up. A layman does not, however, have such an advantage, and must meditate within himself all the harder. This error is a clinging to the idea and desire of something's permanent unfailing existence. The problem is not the idea itself but that its appearance and assertion is based on this clinging. Our refusal to give up the selfish use of our mind and will must find its justification somewhere, in order to draw attention from awareness to discussion.

The point of the Buddha teaching against the ideas of existence or annihilation was and is to keep us from falling into these errors. For when we believe in one of these opinions, we have already missed the point and fallen out of zazen. The other way in which we seek to avoid training is by longing for the destruction of things that exist. This manifests itself as a dislike of our own thoughts, and those of others whenever they mirror things in ourselves which we don't want to face.

A sure sign of such problems is the insistence on one's rights, which implies a loss of compassion towards and understanding of others. When we try, in our meditation, to create, suppress, or colour our thoughts, we are soon overpowered by them and fall into reacting blindly to their content.. It is only by not contending with them that they are unable to affect us. This applies also in daily life, as soon as one insists; not only will this very folly be perpetuated, but it has as its cause the blind reactions that led to the insistence.

To have as our goal only awareness or only loving kindness should be an indication that we have fallen into these errors. To exclusively pursue loving kindness or to be attached thereto is to be caught by 'God is Love' or 'all is One'. Believing them to express something actual is to be caught within symbols. One is at the top of a 100-foot pole and still needs to take another step. As it says in "The Most Excellent Mirror - Samadhi",

Even should we penetrate these doctrines, practices, and then delusive consciousness flows through the 'ternal truth, no progress shall we make. If outwardly all calm we do appear, and yet within disturbed should be, we are as if a tethered horse, or as a mouse within a cage.

On the other hand, if we pursue only awareness, we cling to the belief that the Truth cannot be had in this world of forms and appearances, and thus, long for their destruction. In terms of our meditation, either one suppresses one's thoughts or else abuses and ignores everything that disagrees with one's own opinions. Whichever of these particulars a person uses to manifest a quietist attitude of mind, only through zazen practice can an equilibrium be restored. To be able to maintain such a balance, guidelines are needed, as great effort is required to avoid both extremes.

On Training

These guidelines help keep an immediate purpose within oneself by which the swaying of thought can be checked and penetrated. As an 'end' the Buddhist seeks a peace of mind of which he has very little experience and knowledge. Without some immediate measure to apply to a tumultuous mind, without some course of action, he will spend his efforts to no purpose and gain no improvement. For the trainee, the immediate aim is purity of heart (or will) By constantly focussing concentration on the intentions behind our actions, and avoiding those that initially break the precepts and later are generated by an involvement in greed, hate, or delusion, we learn the true meaning of keeping still. To keep still means to have no leaning towards the fires of the passions of awareness.

Thus one of the keynotes of training is non-indulgence in selfish thoughts, or harbouring secretive and resentful opinions of others; even to think that we have turned back such a thought can bring us, again, to self-indulgence. Disturbances arise only when we are acting from an attitude of mind that is selfish and rooted in our own opinions. This does not mean: do not form opinions; rather, come to know how and when you do. We usually find that they come out of a desire to avoid the issue of the situation. To face it would require us to admit we could be at fault.

Via zazen we see things for what they are, but such seeing is not itself sufficient. By our will we decide either to follow them like a donkey after a carrot or to be immovable, whether they are in our imagination or in our external circumstances. The great loadstone by which we guide our efforts is embodied in the precepts, from them we receive the teaching of loving kindness. Without loving kindness, awareness fades into discrimination; and without awareness, loving kindness to treacle. Both of them have their roots within ourselves, and that is where we find them after we have been smelted by Preceptual Truth.

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