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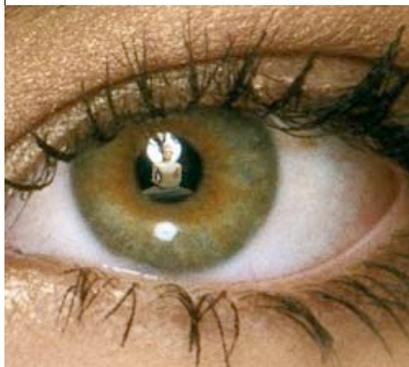
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At the prison gate, step aside

by Ven Kobutsu Malone, Osho, The Buddhist Channel, Aug 25, 2009

Speaking up about controversial issues is a tough gig. Why do it any time? And especially why would a Buddhist priest do it?

Sedgwick, MA (USA) -- Controversial issues are bound with things that shake preconceptions we hold that most closely define our self-image. We all have vested interests, irrespective of alleged "spiritual attainment," "Dharma transmission," or "great wisdom." Granted the way of the Tao teaches that as soon as we pick and choose, we distance ourselves from the path.



However, in reality, who would choose to sit on a dirty toilet seat when the one next to it is clean? If we did choose to sit on the stinky seat for some rationalized reason of "having transcended" we are simply deluding ourselves into thinking we have some sort of accomplishment, we are catering to a self-image preconception. "I'm of the Tao – slimy toilet seats are the same as royal thrones." Hey, be my guest.... I'll put my wrinkly old ass on the clean seat, thank you very much!

Addressing the controversial is not simple, by its nature that which is controversial is going to ruffle feathers – stir up negativity. In itself, controversy is neither good nor bad, nor profane or sacred, the issue

of the controversy is the meat of the matter. We don't have to look far to find issues that at one time were "controversial" and were addressed, brought into the spotlight to be examined and dissected through discriminating awareness, logic, questioning authority, questioning preconceived "truths," communication and scientific method. People may become complacent over time and wish only to maintain the status quo out of the need for false security and to maintain their rigid notions of their own worldviews as the basis for defining themselves. In defining the universe, we define ourselves through our relationship to the universe.

This brings to mind a formal talk given by a former teacher of mine that served as a point of departure in my relationship with him. The text of the talk was published in one of "the Buddhist glossies" and I happened to read the magazine by chance. I read the piece and was initially stunned. I re-read it several times to make sure I was fully grasping the "gist" of what the teisho was about. The following quote jumped out at me:

"The other day I received an e-mail with a short article about a therapist in Hawaii who had the ability to heal mentally ill prison inmates without ever seeing them. At first, I was half-believing, half-doubting. But as I continued reading the article, I couldn't help but agree with this doctor's methods."

Typically my former teacher would be wearing an elaborate, extravagantly expensive brocade kesa, sitting on the high seat, in the Dharma hall making those statements. He would be addressing a group of clergy and lay students gathered for Sesshin.

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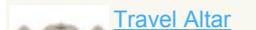
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What they are hearing is that this man is in agreement with the methods of a doctor who has evidently claimed to be able to heal mental illness at a distance. The teacher's statement indicates that he is in agreement with the doctor's "method." He does not explicitly state that he subscribes to the truth of the claim that mental illness can be "healed" from a distance but his statement certainly implies to his audience that he agrees with the premise, as he makes no effort to assert otherwise.

The format of the talk is such that no one in the "audience" can offer any comment or ask any questions. In effect all gathered are a captive audience with no ability to offer input, express disagreement or challenge any viewpoint. If some brave soul were to do so, they would be sealing their fate and would be told to leave, most likely never to return.

From where I'm sitting, the alleged claim of the doctor being discussed, in and of it's self, is patently absurd. The doctor is claiming to be able, in essence, to perform miracles. Such claims reek of magical thinking, delusions of power, grandiosity, arrogance and even omnipotence.

In holding up such a model of the universe, the teacher holds up a mirror of his own perception of himself.

With my experience in prisons and with prisoners during the past two decades, my attention was drawn to that particular statement in the talk. Prisons are bastions of mental illness ranging from mild (i.e. "normal") to profoundly psychotic, manifesting in forms ranging from harmless to exceedingly dangerous (criminally insane, mass murderers). I have worked with the full gamut of people in these circumstances.

The first thing that crossed my mind on reading the lines about prisoners was, why does this doctor limit his "practice" of "distance healing" of mental illness to prisoners? Why on earth didn't he focus his attention on the White House, where really dangerous mentally ill people were rather than on anonymous prisoners in some isolated hellhole?

What is this so-called teacher thinking in bringing up such blatantly absurd claims in a formal talk? He uses the self-serving claims of this deluded doctor to buttress a completely non-Buddhistic, dualistic premise that the entire universe is somehow a "projection" of himself. His precise words further on in the talk:

"To me, total responsibility means that everything — literally every single phenomenon inside and outside of my being — is wholly a projection of myself." [italics in context]

The article this well known alleged Zen teacher refers to in the teisho is about Dr. Ihaleakala Hew Len and is entitled "The World's Most Unusual Therapist" by Dr. Joe "Mr. Fire" Vitale. The article references only anecdotal claims of the doctor himself and makes no reference to any sort of investigation. No witnesses.

Dr. Ihaleakala Hew Len teaches something called Ho'oponopono. His organization is called, "The Foundation of I, Inc. Freedom of the Cosmos" <http://www.hooponopono.org/>

Dr. Joe "Mr. Fire" Vitale's web page <http://www.mrfire.com/> claims that he is the founder & president of Hypnotic Marketing, Inc. His homepage states: "Besides being one of the five top marketing specialists in the world today, and the world's first hypnotic writer, Joe is also a certified hypnotherapist, a certified metaphysical practitioner, a certified Chi Kung healer, and an ordained minister. He also holds a doctorate degree in Metaphysical Science and another doctorate degree in Marketing."

This whole business has nothing to do with Buddha Dharma; it appears to be a foray into sociopathic, megalomaniacal, magical thinking. What is being promoted here is described as by its proponents themselves as "self-help." Let me state it clearly... Zen is not about "self-help" it is not about "self" anything.

In dealing with controversy we have a foundation of guidelines offered in the Kalama Sutra. This is a Theravadan Sutra and is not taught in the Japanese Zen traditions. On studying the text and examining the history and structure of Japanese Zen it becomes easy to grasp the reason the Sutra is ignored in the tradition.

In the Kalama Sutra we find specific instructions – Question the one in the robes, profoundly question the one in the fancy robes, think for yourself, don't take anyone's word for anything. Check it out... question what you hear, what you read – question what you teach, and what you publish.

Setting up self-serving world-views that support arrogance is not Buddha Dharma. In the Anatta-lakkha?a Sutta we learn, "There is no self, no "being," no "my" to have any "being" No



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self inside — No self outside

Hui Neng, the legendary Sixth Patriarch of Zen, put it this way:

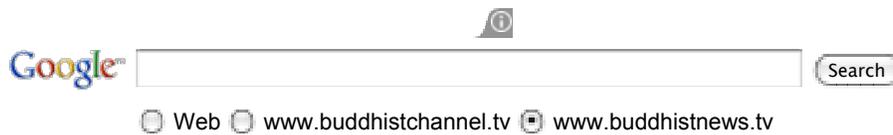
*There is no Bodhi tree,
Nor stand of mirror bright.
Since all is void,
Where can the dust alight?*

This one puts it another way:

*At the prison gate, step aside
Let white moon light
Shine through iron bars.*

A Buddhist priest is responsible for presenting truth that can be examined, questioned and digested, not magical, megalomaniacal thinking. Dialog and communication are vital to communication, alleged "truth" presented from on high as unquestionable is extremely suspect if just in its manner of presentation. If a Buddhist priest is truly serving people he or she is obligated to encourage questioning and meticulous examination.

To question a former teacher is perhaps "controversial" but to say nothing while people are being lead astray into the self-serving delusion of another is criminal. This Buddhist priest would far prefer to enter into controversy than to remain silent in conspiracy to delude.



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