

Coastside Vipassana Dharma Talk by Jim Bronson, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## Birth, Rebirth and Other Conceptions: The Sudden Path



Last Wednesday, December 9<sup>th</sup> 2009, Jim presented the fifth part of his series, ***Practicing in a Precarious World***. Last week's dharma talk is prefaced with excerpts from the previous talks.

### The Gradual Path to Freedom

<http://coastsidevipassana.org/talkarchive/Jim%20Bronson-05-20-09.pdf>

Generosity: Dana, Sila, Bhavana - Three ways to open the treasures of this life

*Just as the ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, a gradual inclination, with a sudden drop-off only after a long stretch, in the same way this Doctrine and Discipline (dhamma-vinaya) has a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual progression, with a penetration to freedom only after a long stretch.*

— Udana 5.5 ( <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.5.05.than.html>)

The gradual training begins with the practice of generosity (*dana*), which starts the long process of weakening the unawakened practitioner's habitual tendencies to cling to views, to sensuality, and to unskillful modes of thought and behavior. This is followed by the development of virtue (*sila*), the basic level of sense-restraint that helps the practitioner develop a healthy and trustworthy sense of self. The peace of mind born from this level of self-respect provides the foundation for all further progress along the path. Finally, the mind is trained to refine our intentions and our insights so that we instinctively choose the way toward freedom in every decision we make.

### Accepting the Way Things Are – The Practice of 5 Remembrances

<http://coastsidevipassana.org/talkarchive/Jim%20Bronson-06-17-09.pdf>

Opening to just what is as the most skillful means for dealing with this world.

In *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* (p. 115), Thich Nhat Hanh tells us that the Five Remembrances and spacious acceptance will lead to a joyful heart and overcoming suffering. He provides this translation:

*I am of the nature to grow old. There is no way to escape growing old.*

*I am of the nature to have ill-health. There is no way to escape having ill-health.*

*I am of the nature to die. There is no way to escape death.*

*All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them.*

*My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions. (My actions are the ground on which I stand.)*

### **Consciousness and Sensitivity/ The Sound of Silence**

<http://coastsidevipassana.org/talkarchive/Jim%20Bronson-06-17-09.pdf>

The importance of listening, attending, having a beginner's mind of possibility.

In *Freedom from the Known*, Krishnamurthi asks us:

*"Have you ever examined how you listen, it doesn't matter to what, whether to a bird, to the wind . . . to the rushing waters . . . in a dialogue with yourself. . . . ? If we try to listen we find it extraordinarily difficult, because we are always projecting our opinions and ideas, our prejudices, our backgrounds, our inclinations, our impulses; when they dominate we hardly listen to what is being said. . . . One listens and therefore learns, only in a state of attention, a state of silence, in which the whole background is in abeyance, is quiet; then, it seems to me, it is possible to be free."*

## One Breath

<http://coastsidevipassana.org/talkarchive/Jim%20Bronson-07-08-09.pdf>

Using the breath for practice. Finding spaciousness in all that life brings.

Developing skillful intentions and impulses; (the Buddha) "To awaken, to be free", knowing, at last, what to do in every situation

Even though the infinite is indescribable and unknowable, we can touch it, we can perceive it. Opening our heart-mind to that which is greater than ourselves starts with just one breath. One breath is the door to freedom. One breath is not just one breath, but if followed, is One.

When sitting, and following just one breath, notice the spacious awareness. Compare it to your normal life – does the rest of your life seem rushed, full of hasty decisions, cut corners, and shortcuts?

### **Birth, Rebirth and Other Conceptions: The Sudden Path**

Karma is an essential core concept of Buddhism. It tells us that our actions matter. In the *Cula-kammavibhanga Sutta: The Shorter Exposition of Kamma* (MN 135), a student asks the Buddha:

*"Master Gotama, what is the reason, what is the condition, why inferiority and superiority are met with among human beings, among mankind? For one meets with short-lived and long-lived people, sick and healthy people, ugly and beautiful people, insignificant and influential people, poor and rich people, low-born and high-born people, stupid and wise people. What is the reason, what is the condition, why superiority and inferiority are met with among human beings, among mankind?"*

*"Student, beings are owners of kammass, heirs of kammass, they have kammass as their progenitor, kammass as their kin, kammass as their homing-place. It is kammass that differentiate beings according to inferiority and superiority."*

From the Dhammapada we learn:

*You will not find a spot in the world –  
Not in the sky, not in the ocean,  
Not inside a mountain cave –*

*Where you will be free from your evil karma.  
Dhammapada, v 127*

*All experience is preceded by mind,  
Led by mind,  
Made by mind.  
Speak or act with a corrupted mind,  
And suffering follows  
As the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox.*

*All experience is preceded by mind,  
Led by mind,  
Made by mind.  
Speak or act with a peaceful mind,  
And happiness follows  
Like a never departing shadow.  
- Dhammapada, v 1-2*

Jack Kornfield reminds us:

*There is a sign outside a casino in Las Vegas that says, "You must be present to win." The same is true in meditation...*

If you are present, you may win a great prize -- The Pearl Beyond Price, The Unborn, The Deathless, integration of the dimension of the absolute into our life, and the deep peace that comes with liberation.

There is an Island of Safety for us. Where is this island?

*'You're riding on a horse and asking, "Where's the horse?"'  
~ Ajahn Chah*

There is not a special place to be present. You can be present in the ordinary as well as the exotic. Mary Oliver wrote:

*Every day  
I see or hear  
something  
that more or less*

*kills me  
with delight,  
that leaves me  
like a needle  
in the haystack  
of light.*

*It was what I was born for -  
to look, to listen,  
to lose myself  
inside this soft world -  
to instruct myself  
over and over  
in joy,  
and acclamation.*

*Nor am I talking  
about the exceptional,  
the fearful, the dreadful,  
the very extravagant -  
but of the ordinary,  
the common, the very drab,  
the daily presentations.*

*Oh, good scholar,  
I say to myself,  
how can you help  
but grow wise  
with such teachings  
as these -  
the untrimmable light  
of the world,  
the ocean's shine,  
the prayers that are made  
out of grass?*

There are many places to seek wisdom. As Christmas approaches, we often hear the tale of the "Three Wise Men from the East", the *Magi*.

A *magus* (Latin) or *magos* (Greek), from the Old Persian *magu* , originally referred to a priest of Zoroaster (a religion in ancient Persia), and was someone who could read the stars and use that knowledge to alter fate; i.e., an astrologer. *Magi* came to be associated with priest-sorcerers or wizards. The English words *mage* and *magic* both come from this root.

## *Celebration of Epiphany*

Christianity celebrates the three magi on the day of Epiphany, January 6, the last of the "twelve days of Christmas".



In Spain and throughout the Spanish-speaking and Catalan-speaking world, the three kings (*Sp.* "*los Reyes Magos*", also "*Los Tres Reyes Magos*", *Cat.* "*els Reis Mags d'Orient*") receive wish letters from children and magically bring them gifts on the night before Epiphany. The Wise Men come from the Orient on their camels to visit the houses of all the children; like the Northern European Santa Claus with his reindeer, they visit everyone in one night. In some areas, children prepare a drink for each of the kings. In Catalonia, it is also traditional to prepare food and drink for the camels, because this is the only night of the year when they eat.

Spanish- and Catalan-speaking cities organize cavalcades in the evening, in which the kings and their servants parade and throw sweets to the children (and parents) in attendance.

Currently this tradition, like that of the Christmas crib and the Christmas tree, coexists in many regions with Papa Noel (Father Christmas), in Basque areas with Olentzero, and in Catalonia with the *Tió de Nadal*.

### *St Matthew's account*

The *Gospel of Matthew* is the only source describing the birth of Jesus and the visitation of the Magi. According to St Matthew, the Magi first visited Herod (appointed governor of Judea by the Roman Empire), asking him where the new King could be found. Herod, showing his knowledge of local prophesy, sent them to Bethlehem, and asked that they return when they had found him (Matthew 2:1–Matthew 2:8). At Bethlehem, these Magi appeared before the infant Jesus, noting that they had observed his star—the Star of

Bethlehem— rising in the east (other possible translation: his star in the ascendant), and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). The Magi were warned in a divine dream not to go back to Herod, and so returned to Persia by another route. This infuriated Herod and resulted in his massacre of the Holy Innocents (Matthew 2:12, and 16-18).

Though the Qu'ran omits Matthew's description of the episode of the magi, the event itself was well known in Arabia. The Arab encyclopediast, al-Tabari, writing in the 9th century, gives the familiar symbolism of the gifts of the magi. The three gifts had a spiritual meaning: gold as a symbol of kingship on earth, frankincense (incense) as a symbol of priesthood, and myrrh (an embalming oil) as a symbol of death. Sometimes this is described more generally as gold symbolizing virtue, frankincense symbolizing prayer, and myrrh symbolizing suffering.

In addition to the gifts, which were esoteric and far more valuable than the traditional gift of sheep, the Magi knelt before Jesus. In the land of the magi, kneeling was traditional way of honoring a king, although the Jews and Romans viewed kneeling and prostration as beneath them. The Magi's gifts and veneration were seen as honoring Jesus as both King and God.

In Buddhism, however, there is no separation between divinity and humanity.

*When I see that I am nothing - that is wisdom  
When I see that I am all - that is love  
- Nisargadatta Maharaj from "I Am That"*

We are of the nature to be both nothing and all, and realizing that is our freedom. Everything we need for our liberation exists within us. Everything we need will come if we are aware.

*As rivers flow into the sea, losing their individuality, so the enlightened,  
no longer bound by name and form, merge with the infinite, the radiant Cosmic  
Being.  
-Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*

After he was enlightened, Buddha was walking down a path and he was completely glowing. He was shining. He was effulgent. He was what sufis call "*munawwara*" (radiant, effulgent).

*A man came up to him and was so taken by the light, he asked, "Are you a god?"*

*The Buddha answered, "No".*

*And then he said, "Well, then you must be a magician".*

*"No".*

*"Are you a man?"*

*"No."*

*"Then, what are you"?*

*"I am awake."*

Jack Kornfield says that to think that there are enlightened beings versus unenlightened is misleading. It is not that one is either completely enlightened, or not at all. Rather, there are only enlightened behaviors.

*Faring far, wandering alone,  
Formless and lying in a cave.  
Those who do train the mind  
Are sure released to lives of freedom.  
Free are those who control their minds.  
- Dhammapada v 37*