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mp 94 Secular Dharma 10-18-16

I have been reading Stephen Batchelor over the past couple of weeks (Buddhism without Beliefs and Confession of a Buddhist Atheist). This is like real comfort food (mash potatoes and gravy). All the good stuff of Buddhism without all the metaphysical (Reincarnation, Karma extending through multiple lives, etc). Batchelor argues that the core of what Buddha taught is really about living life fully and completely. When asked about God, or afterlife or origins of the universe Buddha was agnostic. Those questions were besides the point so there was no need to have an opinion on them. What mattered is how to live a life free from anguish. That was a simple. Follow the four noble truths: Embrace (all of our experience), Let Go (of the craving for things to be other than they are), Stop (behavior that causes anguish), and Act (wisely and compassionately).

Along with the four truths about how to live, three other principles are important. One, reality is contingent upon previous conditions. Two, the way to approach our reality is through mindful awareness of our experience. Three, we have to ultimately depend upon our own awareness to determine how to live our lives (self reliance).

This is a worldview I can embrace, it is consistent with science's view of the world and human consciousness and Psychology's view of mental health and a humanists view of what is in the best interests of humanity. I embrace it not only with my mind, but with my body. When I struggle with my experience is when I pull back from rather than dive into what is in me. Whatever it is, a feeling of anger, lust, envy or judgment, I falter when I distance myself from the emotion. I glide through to the extent that I open myself to the uncomfortable or pleasurable.

For example, I don't like to see myself as judgmental, so when I think a harsh thought of someone, my first instinct is too dismiss to quickly. I don't want to dwell on the reality of my unpleasant thought, because it does not conform to my ego needs to be seen as a kind person. The last thing I want to do is dwell on the ugliness of my own thoughts. But once I do open myself to my own consciousness (Embrace), I can begin to see how my mind is constantly churning out a stream of thoughts some of it helpful but much of it useless junk collections of words. Seeing clearly my own mind allows me to (Let Go) to approach my mind as it is with compassion rather than an idealized image of myself. My self is a curious mixture of helpful and unhelpful behaviors and thought constructions.

Why do I have such a hard time giving up on dream of a perfect self? Why do I torture myself with constant boundary maneuvers to defend my perfect self from the attack from my really existing self?

When I do stop this self defeating defense mechanism I can relax into a free space that is quite wonderful (Stop and Act). But those moments are so rare and fare between. When will I get to the third and forth noble truths more quickly and easily. The experience is felt as much if not more than recognized intellectually. I feel the freedom in my body long before I "see" it with my mind. This is how I need to proceed. More through my body. Sensing rather than thinking. That is the heart of my daily, moment to moment practice away from the formal meditation. Living through my body and letting my mind follow rather than lead. Each moment I do, I experience it (life) fully. Why do tarry?

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