

## Bringing the process to the path (David Rome)

A number of people have raised the question, where are the *teachings* in all this?

I'd like to suggest one way that our process work can contribute directly to how we progress along the path.

Let me start with an anecdote:

There is a story about a samurai attached to the household of a great lord. His lord had been murdered by a man from a rival house, and the samurai was sworn to avenge his lord's death. After tracking the assassin for some time, after great personal sacrifice and hardship, and after braving many dangers, the samurai found the murderer. He drew his sword to kill the man. But in that instant the assassin spit in his face. The samurai stepped back, sheathed his sword, and turned and walked away.

Why? He walked away because he was angry that he'd been spat on. He would have killed the assassin, in that moment, out of his own personal anger, not out of his commitment to the ideal his lord represented. His execution of the man would have been out of his ego and his own feelings, not out of the warrior within. So in order to be true to his warrior calling, he had to walk away and let the murderer live.

From Moore and Gillette *King Warrior Magician Lover*

(interesting to note that the ideal his lord represents and the warrior within turn out to be the same thing)

In the intensive and often intense process of our various groups, it is almost inevitable that we will be triggered by others – sometimes by one or two people in particular. This is a precious opportunity to engage the mind-training slogan "Drive all blames into one." The Vidyadhara – who preferred to translate this slogan as "Drive all blames into oneself!" gives a long commentary on it, of which the following is only a snippet:

We prefer to blame our problems on somebody else, whether those problems are political, environmental, psychological, domestic, or spiritual. . . Driving all blames into one is the essence of the bodhisattva path. Even if somebody else has made a terrible mistake and blamed it on you, you should take the blame yourself. In terms of power, it is a much simpler and more direct way of controlling the situation. In addition, it is the most direct way of simplifying complicated neurosis into one point. . . It is easier to talk to somebody when you have already accepted the blame because that person is not in a defensive mood. Then you can clarify the situation, and quite possibly that person, who might be the cause of the problem, will recognize their own wrongdoing. It helps that the blame, which is now just a paper tiger, has been taken on by you.

When we are triggered by another person, accepting the blame means suspending the impulse to attack or defend and instead noticing what the Vidyadhara called "the abstract quality of the emotion." Which is to say, turn your attention inside your body and notice the actual somatic sensations that are present there just now – the "abstract" feeling devoid of any conceptual arguments we might want to make. Doing this is an inner skill that, like mindfulness itself, needs to be cultivated - the ability to inhibit or pause automatic, reflex reactions and to take time to notice how we are actually feeling. When we are able to do this, we are owning our own emotion, taking responsibility for it, and in that sense "driving the blame" into ourselves. We have cut the impulse to escalate the situation either by criticizing the other person or defending ourselves. We have avoided creating some small yet significant bit of new karma.

WARNING: Recognizing and owning negative feelings when we get triggered does not mean that we've done something bad, it does not make us a *bad person*! If we can just be with the feeling without judgment, touching it gently (as in "touch and go," but more like "touch and stay a while"), then there is the real possibility of learning something new about ourselves. The difficult moment becomes a precious opportunity to gain insight into our own habitual patterns - which are themselves *not bad*! but in reality gateways to life-empowering change.

Often what triggers us about another person's speech or behavior is a pointer to some aspect of our own makeup that we haven't yet recognized. Example: I accused someone else in the group of being too insistent and talking too much. Upon a moment's reflection I could see that asserting myself and talking too much is a behavioral/karmic tendency I myself have. And even though I have learned over time to moderate my assertiveness, nonetheless the place that is getting triggered in me likely has something to do with unresolved aspects of my need to express myself. Again, the need to express oneself is *not bad*! Of course we should express ourselves - but not to the extent of dominating the available airtime and squeezing out less assertive – and perhaps more valuable - voices.

In this little episode I failed to inhibit an impulse and therefore hurt someone's feelings. But - recognizing a mistake like this ("not afraid to be a fool") gives one the opportunity to contemplate and gain insight into what really just happened. Sometimes a second or two of reflection is enough, but more likely one will have to remember this moment and dedicate some time later on to sitting with it and sensing what it is about at a deeper level. In my own case, I have discovered that the urge to assert myself is largely about old needs from childhood to be seen, recognized, heard, admired. Recognizing this, the need becomes much less insistent, more transparent, more under my conscious control. (Just not quite enough to make me perfect yet.)

In the thick of conversation, especially conversation that that is emotional in nature, how do we know when to speak up and when to restrain ourselves? The best guideline I know comes from the practice of Council or Talking Circle. It is to ask ourselves: "Am I truly doing this for the benefit of the group and its goal? Or is this more about me, my own needs and wants?" Again: I am not saying that one's own needs and wants are to be suppressed – not at all, but what we are talking about here is situational self-awareness, self-compassion and skillful means.