

A sample post

layout: post

title: The Buddha's smile

date: 2014-10-07 15:50:47

leader: Martin

keep_blurb_after_meeting: no

reading_author: Martin Evans

allow_comments: yes

reading_snippet: I want you to look at the Buddha's face. Can you see his smile? It is very subtle. Why is he smiling? Is he experiencing a blissful meditative state? Or is it the smile of someone who is experiencing nothing?

When I was at school was told off for smiling. I was given a detention. And when I was in detention I was given another. I was still smiling. I was told to 'wipe that smirk off my face'. I didn't know it was wrong to smile until then. Most people love to see a smile. There is nothing more warming to the heart than to be met with a smile.

I want you to look at the Buddha's face. Can you see his smile? It is very subtle. Why is he smiling? Is he experiencing a blissful meditative state? Or is it the smile of someone who is experiencing nothing?

We can think that the Buddha's enlightenment is an escape from the world, an escape through meditation into a sublime state of existence. If we think that then we try to create this blissful state, through practicing some meditation technique, to develop concentration. But the Buddha rejected the path of concentration as leading to the ultimate goal in itself. He tried it and found it didn't lead to the end of suffering. He didn't deny the benefits of the concentrated mind, but he didn't find it led him to the experience of the truth of the way things are.

Again, we can think that it is a complete escape into nothingness or some sort of non-existence. Well, the Buddha was very clear that his enlightenment wasn't of this world nor another. It wasn't an escape of any sort. It was a release, a freedom, but not a rejection.

So what is this smile? I think it is the experience of now. The end of seeking for anything other than the way it is right now. In our worldly thinking we could say 'contentment with nothing', because the currency of our experience is the past and the future. There is no experience of now in the grasping mind.

I think this word now is a better word than mindful or aware. How is it right now? This question brings us into the immediacy of awareness or mindfulness, whereas to think of being aware indicates something we are going to be in the future. In the future we will never be aware, if we are not aware in the now.

It is the experience of laying down a burden. Doesn't that bring on a smile? Ah, yes, I know how that feels. When I walked from Lands End to John O'Groats I learnt all about how it felt to lay down my burden at the end of the day. The funny thing is, all we seek is contentment and that laying down of the burden is all it takes, that letting go into the way things are.

And it is the smile of compassion. Isn't that a mystery, where this compassion comes from when there is no one trying to be compassionate. We think that we need to become compassionate. We don't have the trust that compassion is the expression of our true nature. When this sense of me and mine dissolves, this delusion of self, then there is nothing hindering the expression of

compassion. And, although compassion is feeling the suffering of others, nevertheless, here it is in the form of a smile. But it is a slightly sad smile isn't it. A smile that embraces both happiness and suffering. Not an escape from the world, but a complete openness to the world.

##Isn't it wonderful, that the Buddha's smile is already within us, just waiting to get out.##

When we meditate we should cultivate this smile, we need to gladden the heart. I don't mean to become happy clappy people - Theravada Buddhism tends to appeal to people who like to take things seriously – but the right attitude to practice is a light heartedness. We shouldn't make it into a struggle. This is how people so often approach it, through their conditioning. They are looking for something to make a struggle out of. When you tell them it is their nature to see, they don't listen. They don't trust in their own ability to see the truth because it can't be like that, life has to be an endless struggle. So it is. It goes on and on.

If you follow a meditation technique, it can be something to create a problem out of, rather than a stick to support you in your practice. It really doesn't much matter what technique you use provided you have the right attitude to your practice. Certainly some techniques are more suited to certain temperaments. But the trouble is, what would be most helpful is generally the one we least want to do. This is certainly true of loving kindness (*metta*). It is most beneficial to people of an angry temperament, but the people who really like doing it are those of a lustful temperament. (We all have these temperaments but one tends to predominate. Our challenge is to bring them into balance). That's why it's a good idea to think of giving yourself up to the practice, rather than cling to what you like. After you have tried it, then you can see for yourself whether it was beneficial or not. This willingness to be open to whatever is in the moment creates a pliant mind, which of wonderful benefit, far greater than whatever benefit you could get out of any meditation technique.

...

Another sample post

layout: post
title: Meditative enquiry
date: 2015-02-04 19:30:00
leader: Nick
keep_blurb_after_meeting: no
allow_comments: no

And another sample post

layout: post
title: Four Noble Truths
date: 2015-02-04 19:30:00
leader: Simon
meeting_blurb: Ajahn Sumedho's book *Four Noble Truths* is available to read online.
keep_blurb_after_meeting: yes
allow_comments: no
reading_snippet: I encourage you to try to understand *dukkha* — to really look at stand under and accept your suffering.
reading_author: Ajahn Sumedho
reading_webpage: <http://forestsanghapublications.org/viewBook.php?id=32&ref=deb>
