

Movement

Sunday, October 5, 2014

Who is Zen for?

In some senses, for everyone. But practically speaking, to make sense of this path a person needs:

- a capacity for self-awareness
- willingness to do the experiment
- longing for something
- curiosity
- persistence in the face of obstacles—inner and outer
- energy vs. apathy
- “instructibility”—willingness to learn, from teacher/teachings, from each other, from their own experience
- capacity to recognize and release fixed views and opinions

In coming to a place like this, what are people moving away from, or trying to escape?

For a particular person, we can't really know, but there are some forces that drive many people to this path:

- dissatisfaction with “the way things are”
- anxiety or despair—about themselves, about their relationships, about the state of the world
- identity collapse: I don't know who I am any more
- crisis
- loneliness
- impact of greed, hatred, ignorance: in themselves, in the world
- loss of meaning and purpose
- apathy
- disconnect
- overwhelm, complexity, fragmentation
- fear/dread about the future
- need to “fix” something: in themselves, in others, in the world
- past trauma

Governments are failing us; they are locked in struggle for power and brutal, pointless combat. They offer little that generates goodness. Corporations and the wealthy mostly seek to plunder the world. They offer soulless jobs and meager compensations while they strip the world of its resources and beauty. Media have abandoned the role they might have played to educate and enlighten us, and focused on distraction, sensationalism, and artful commodification. The world is filled with calamities, war, and disasters of every kind. What can we do? Is it really possible that *this tiny place*, and *these people* might provide some kind of relief, some alternative to the insanity?

What are people really seeking? You can look around and see that most of the strategies they are using cannot provide what they seek. The seeking that brings people here usually has two levels, the expedient level (my immediate goal or expectation) and the deeper, more profound level. Was that your experience?

What can we offer at Appamada?

- a clear space
- silence instead of chatter and clatter
- stillness instead of busyness and distraction
- quiet, easy connection and care
- introduction to a profound curriculum called “your own path”
- wisdom of ancient teachings for guidance and support
- sky-like mind
- warm, open heart
- attunement to life as it is
- liberation from all that binds us
- participation in an *epic* story: the creation of a new world emerging as mindful, energized care and utter clarity, right in the midst of the dying world of survival—a world saturated with greed, hatred, and ignorance.

How vital and urgent is this development?

I can't actually think of anything more important right now. We need to come together to build the world that we want, right in the teeth of all that it is not. This is a heroic, creative act. And it is a massive challenge, because all that we build must exist in a world that cannot comprehend it, that does not value it, that seeks always to assert the absolute necessity for its way—the way of survival. It has to be created not by mass movements and not with vast resources, but in the most simple way, in this moment, in this encounter, over and over again.

And this alternative world, the world of *appamada*, will prove compelling. As it is embodied and expressed by each one of you, it will heal the world and invite others to share the journey of creating the reality we all want to live in, together. The world as it is is just the canvas we are creating it on; the medium is our hearts and minds and bodies; our brushes and tools are the teachings that inform our practice, and our friendships on this path.

The challenge

We all long to be part of an epic story, a story that saves the world. We are all failed superheroes at heart. But we are also a little hesitant, a little lazy, a little confused, a little intermittent in our commitment to act. Possibly we have doubts: how can me sitting here doing nothing and staring at the wall help the world? How can these tiny bands of parents, of retirees, of men and women possibly be a powerful force for change? How can four truths spoken by a man nearly 2500 years ago possibly have any

relevance today? And how can all of this help me with my particular problems, life circumstances, difficult people, terror, loneliness, and pain?

Frankly, most people are not interested in or willing to do the difficult work of turning toward their own conditioning, their own beliefs about themselves and the world, their own habits and tendencies with something like curiosity, clear seeing, and compassion. But there are some people, as the Buddha said, with only a little dust in their eyes. They begin to really imagine the possibility for transformation.

So we dip our toe in the water, try a bit of zazen, occasionally. We make a nice friendly connection with someone in the sangha, we read a little, maybe listen to a talk like this. That's how it all begins, for most of us, in a tentative, hesitant way. "I'm not a joiner." "I don't like organized religion." "I don't know if this will work for me." "I don't know if I belong here." "I want to be special." "I don't want to have to be responsible for anything."

But those of you who have been around a while notice that a half-hearted, lukewarm practice is not very satisfying. Sooner or later, you need wholehearted commitment to your own path, to the community, to the world we want to build together. For each person this realization comes at the point where they can no longer ignore the very real longing in their own hearts, the longing for connection, mutual care, entry into the great mystery, and support on their path. I wish I could give you a shortcut that will magically transport you there, but I can only offer this: patiently, steadily practice daily zazen, study the wisdom teachings, connect warmly with the teachers and spiritual friends that form this community to support you.

The power of a vow that is shared.

Somehow we discover together our deep vow and we become dedicated to the unhindered expression of it. The obstacles we thought were in the way begin to naturally drop off, and the path opens more and more before us. It doesn't require us to quit our jobs, leave our families, move into a monastery, or alter anything whatsoever in our life circumstances. Right where we are, we begin our work as ambassador of the dharma, of the new world of mindful, energetic care. The opportunities are everywhere to express your own vow, to live your own way in the midst of the world's trouble, strife, pain, and confusion.

Movement

But we can't do this alone. It depends on the Zen teaching of "not two," the capacity to fully be yourself, together with others who support and inspire you. You might call it DIYT: *Do it yourself—together*. What are the tiny steps you can take, right now, to experience the world in this new way? The discoveries are your own, and you will make sense of them (or not) as the way unfolds. Teachers can help, study can help, but what helps the most are spiritual friendships: warm, caring connections with others who are

building the world we all want to live in. But I call this talk *Movement* because that is what is required. There is no time for apathy and indecision. Either we begin to actualize our vows, join with others in the creation of a structural alternative to the existing world, or we will perish, and we will do so in despair, remorse, and anguish.

We need a movement to actively develop the world we want, right in the midst of the one that is failing. We need to cultivate a world that is based not on survival, but care. Since there is no lack of opportunity for expressing care, we are fully engaged, fully awake. Since there is no lack in us of the capacity to express care, we can be generous and unflagging. Since there is no boundary or horizon for care, we can be free. "Survival" is irrelevant. Even our own death is an offering, and when we are gone, what continues to perpetuate itself is this very quality of mindful, energetic care, just as we have shared it with others. It continues to grow and multiply without being the least bit depleted by its use, by adverse circumstances, by conditioning in others, by our own confusion or inexperience. It requires nothing of others, not good will, or agreement, or cooperation, or even gratitude. Still, it restores our fundamental connection to life as it is, and grounds us in the unshakable experience of the worth of every living being, and of the luminous earth itself.

The work we can do together is the foundation for joy, creativity, belonging, aliveness, compassion, wisdom, care, and dedication. It is the boundless field of benefaction in our robe chant, not merely something we wear, but something we actively weave, together, using only our hearts, our minds, and our bodies. Are you interested in this?