

Dharmette: Seeing Yourself as Whole

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsda1 on April 18, 2012

Two of you came to interviews today and mentioned the instructions I gave in the morning about letting go of thinking, and how that instruction just made things worse. Somehow the thinking mind didn't like to hear that, and so it thought harder. That's certainly possible. So, letting go of thoughts in that active, directed way may sometimes not be very useful.

Or, it could be an opportunity to see and understand more deeply something about the reactive mind, the threatened mind, and the judgments that go into doing a practice like this – how we get stirred up, rather than becoming more still or quiet. In case there were others of you who were stirred up rather than settled, you had company. Hopefully, someday it will be useful to know how to let go of thoughts.

The subject I want to talk about today is how most of us have a particular way of looking at and understanding ourselves. There are many ways of understanding oneself. An interesting question is, "With what eyes – with what understanding – do you tend to see yourself?" Many times the understanding with which you understand yourself can be a tremendous source of suffering. So, are there other ways of understanding yourself, other ways of seeing or regarding yourself that don't cause suffering? Are there other ways that not only don't cause suffering, but perhaps bring you a sense of ease, happiness, satisfaction, or meaningfulness?

Sometimes I've practiced with the question, "What would it be like if I were seen through the eyes of the Buddha?" Or, "If I had the eyes of the Buddha, how would I see myself? How might it be different from how I usually see myself?"

Some of you have probably been seen by someone else, and, in being seen and understood, you felt that they were relating to you very differently from how you relate to yourself. Some people are very mean to themselves. Or they feel very critical of themselves. Or they feel guilty before having done anything to be guilty. Or they feel inadequate in some way. They feel scared, thinking, "If somehow people really saw who I am, they are not going to like me, and they're going to reject me."

But then someone does look at you and sees you. Maybe they see parts of you you'd rather not have other people see. Or perhaps they see that you feel inadequate, or they feel how guilty you seem. They see that, but they don't believe it because they see you in a very different light. They see you as a whole person. Maybe they see you as a beautiful person. Or they see you with respect and kindness.

How do you see yourself? How do you normally go around seeing yourself? Are there other ways of seeing yourself? Something I'd like to suggest that you experiment with, or be challenged by, or try out, is to assume that you're whole. See yourself as if you're already whole. What happens if you see yourself as if you're already whole? What does it mean for you to be already whole?

Many people are divided against themselves. They have parts of themselves they don't like, parts they want to push away or hide, or want to pretend aren't there, or parts that are secret or very private. In a variety of ways, people are divided against themselves. Or they feel that they are not whole because of some inadequacy or something wrong with them. The idea of being whole, I think, implies that there's nothing wrong with you. It's also a very respectful way to see someone. To see someone as whole, as a person with a certain degree of maturity or autonomy, or worthy of respect. You're a full citizen, a full person here.

Something that I appreciated from the little contact I had with Buddhist monastic life (and I don't know if this might have been my projection) was that once someone was ordained as a monk or a nun, there were certain ways in which one then entered a hierarchy. As a new monk or nun, one had to deal with people more senior. But then there was another way in which, once ordained, that new monk or nun became an equal member of the community and was seen as whole. Not exactly autonomous, but given a certain kind of full citizenship, a certain autonomy and ability to decide or choose for oneself.

What would it mean if, in your mind, you saw yourself as being whole, the way you use the word 'whole'? What if

you're already whole, as opposed to already messed up, an embarrassment to the human race? Rather than seeing yourself as somehow less than other people, in seeing yourself as whole, there's no need anymore to compare yourself to anybody else. No need for comparisons such as someone further along in the practice, someone better than me, someone kinder than me, someone smarter than me. Such comparisons are about not quite being up to something, not adequate, not a full citizen yet, or not seeing yourself as whole.

To see yourself as whole implies a kind of acceptance. Who you are, how you are as a person is enough; it's great. You don't have to be different. If you're not a very smart person, then you're a whole person who's not smart, and there's nothing wrong with that. If you are a person with some handicap or disability, and our society somehow treats you as not being a full citizen, you are still a whole person, a whole person with a disability. It's perfect.

Lots of great things have happened to me in being around kids, now that I have children. One thing was that I had no idea how many children are born with circumstances that make them different from the conventional person (there's one or two conventional people in the United States so we have something to compare against). But there are not that many. I started hanging out with children who are autistic, or dyslexic, or have Asperger's. I didn't know about this when I was growing up, but now there's a whole new understanding of kids with various kinds of hypersensitivities. Hearing might be hypersensitive, so any extra noise in the classroom makes these kids go batty. Or their skin is really sensitive to touch. Before, we thought these were just difficult kids, but now we understand them in a different way – it's the way they were born. Especially when I started hanging out with kids with autism, I felt that these are children and all you can do is love them. They're whole; they're complete. They've come into the world this way, but are they less than anybody else? I don't think so. There are an infinite number of ways to be a human person, each of them complete. And to look at people as being complete in who they are, as opposed to "not quite up to snuff."

How do you look at yourself? With what eyes do you see yourself? Are those kind eyes? Generous eyes? Compassionate eyes? Wise eyes? Or not?

What I offer is to experiment with the idea that you're already whole. See what's it's like to walk around the world with that idea. You're already fine. You're already perfect in a way. What happens then for you?