

1. Commitment and Intensity ~ I've allowed some heedless habits to creep in recently, things like having wine on a regular basis rather than at special dinners or occasions. I don't have any personal conviction to say 'no wine' at this point in life, but do feel that if I can't be disciplined about it yes, I'll have to let it go entirely. Last night for instance, I came upon a very lucid place in dreaming, and in the midst of it knew that I would not be there, or at the very least would not appreciate/remember/bring it into the next day, had I decided to have two glasses of wine before bed as I had been doing.

This mirrors choices I've made in the last year regarding diet and also regarding computer time... in general knowing that there aren't any 'no's, but there are actions and conditions more conducive for constant and continual practice, and clearer/lucid awareness, than others.

So, living in this way, with this much attention and refining it more and more, does require a certain intensity and commitment. *"You have to be honest to live outside the law."* Bob Dylan

2. Familiarization ~ This to me is about refinement of noticings. Rather than trying to stop doing this or that, 'feeling' one's way into refinement and definition of practice and living.

Actually, I haven't articulated this one for myself very well yet, but thought zen's pointing toward "BE OURSELVES" came close... excavating authentic presense. :)

3. White Seeds Vs. Black Seeds ~ One thing it seems to be about is noticing what gives energy, versus draining it... back to paying attention to conditions (#1). Also back to the idea of a hierarchy of desires which has been helpful for me, it can be about paying attention to the deeper, more personally substantive things, even at the expense of the surface/shallow considerations ie 'outer witness'.

I really like Dao's pointing to virtuous vs. vicious cycles, and find that a very helpful elaboration... seeds as processes... patterns unfolding.

4. Turning from Ego Trips ~ This idea has taken a turn for me, toward thinking that an ego trip can be 'oh little me' as well as it can be 'oh great me', and that both can be a way of abdicating responsibility. "Little me" can't take responsibility and "Big me" feels they are above doing so. :)

5. Dedicating merits ~ I find this to be, next to pratityasamutpada itself, an incredibly liberating teaching. I'm completely in love with the 'idea', but beyond that, have found it a supremely handy tool when feeling overcharged or confused... a reminder of a vast and intricate/unfathomable scope of interlayered interconnectedness. :)

"My gain is the gain of everyone endlessly" as the Song of Enlightenment goes. :)

Which leads into **Tonglen** quite naturally:

It seems important to mention the importance of 'raising the mind of compassion' when talking about tonglen, as without that it's like trying to take on suffering from a place of ego, as though self is capable of 'doing' that kind of openness and wisdom and generosity.

Bodhicitta is 'itself' the antidote to suffering, so just not hindering that compassion seems a good stance, stepping out of the way. So the way of breathing is itself a tool to that end... visualizing the desire/raising the aspiration for bodhicitta to be the natural antidote that it is.

In one of Steven's teachings (I probably need a better way of identifying them in my i-pod) he talks about tonglen from a stance of (my words) actively not closing out suffering, rather than looking for some to take in. I appreciated that subtle shift.