

So this week's topic was "Train Wholeheartedly" and "Abandon All Hope of Results." This is a very interesting pair of aphorisms, for a wide variety of reasons. In Buddhism in particular there has always been a subtle tension between what, in Zen, for example, was long called the "sudden" versus the "gradual" schools of enlightenment (or Southern and Northern schools in China). This can be illustrated by this famous and beautiful Zen story about the Sixth Patriarch:

One day the Fifth Patriarch told his monks to express their wisdom in a poem. Whoever had true realization of his original nature (Buddha Nature) would be ordained the Sixth Patriarch. The head monk, Shen Hsiu, was the most learned, and wrote the following:

**The body is the wisdom-tree,  
The mind is a bright mirror in a stand;  
Take care to wipe it all the time,  
And allow no dust to cling.**

**The poem was praised, but The Fifth Patriarch knew that Shen Hsiu had not yet found his original nature, on the other hand, Hui Neng couldn't even write, so someone had to write down his poem, which read:**

**Fundamentally no wisdom-tree exists,  
Nor the stand of a mirror bright.  
Since all is empty from the beginning,  
Where can the dust alight**

**The Fifth Patriarch pretended that he wasn't impressed with this poem either, but in the middle of the night he summoned Hui Neng. The Fifth Patriarch gave him the insignia of his office, the Patriarch's robe and bowl. Hui Neng was told to leave for the South and to hide his enlightenment and understanding until the proper time arrives for him to propagate the Dharma.**

This Zen story is warning against thinking of contemplative practice as a means to an end in an ordinary sense, an activity in which one is striving to achieve a result to come in the future. But the phrase "Train Wholeheartedly" makes it sound like contemplation is not only an activity but one which one ought to put in a lot of effort! But the "Abandon All Hope of Results" is a counterbalance to this, a gesture towards a principle which is similar to what the above Zen story alludes to, which is that training with the notion that one is trying to achieve a goal (for example, enlightenment), is itself based on a misunderstanding of the existential condition.

Of course, not every school of Buddhism teaches the same thing, and I think one might argue that the Lojong aphorisms do take a slightly different view of the nature and purpose of practice than the teaching espoused in the Zen story, above. However, the balancing of "train wholeheartedly" with "abandon all hope of results" is, nevertheless, a pointer towards a dynamic which the author of the Lojong aphorisms surely understood

through practice. It is in a sense a koan: if there is no goal in an ordinary sense to practice, then why practice? Because both Zen and Tibetan Buddhism and pretty much every school of Buddhism, whether "sudden" or "gradual" all recommend contemplative practice of some sort, even quite intensive practice, retreats, and so on. If one is to recommend practice, but at the same time say one ought to practice without hope of results, or even to say that the whole idea of a "goal" or a "result" is fundamentally based on a misunderstanding, then why recommend practice?

I don't think this question can be easily answered in words, but one can suggest some ways of beginning to think about it. Practice can be seen as a gesture, a posture so to speak; while trying to wrestle with the koan of "abandon all hope of results", one can nevertheless make a gesture towards the already complete. We sit, or do some other practice, not as a means towards an end, but as a way of mimicking, to some extent, the form of what is always already present even before we begin. I sometimes think of it as a resonance, to some extent; though there is nothing to attain and no one to attain it, we can certainly suffer as a result of the delusion of incompleteness and lack; and by gesturing towards the alternative, we can make room for a resonance with the way things already are, and thus help ourselves relax the constant construction of a false reality which we are constantly trying to overlay on top of what is already there. It's not that we lack anything; if anything it's that we're constantly attempting to add to Being an excess. We already have the universe, but we try to add to that completeness and thereby (seemingly, though not in actuality) impoverish ourselves.