

In Workshop 18, coincidentally held on the 18th of June, Stim proposed we investigate the idea of "going" after having described how the samsaric mind has a grip on us, and how we can obtain an unfettered view of reality (all in a context of codependent arising.)

Stim mentioned a pervasive characteristic of repetitious cycles where we unwittingly drift into something, then adopt it, get taken for a ride and then dumped, with each cycle leaving seeds of unknowing for the next time around.

"We should start by just noticing more.... the idea here on every level is to break the chain, the pattern of links, by learning how they go, seeing the pattern in your own life, and declining to follow it." Learning to see more of what is actually present is part of Nagarjuna's view of codependent arising, that "unawakeness re one thing strengthens the apparent reality or presence of others and vice versa." "So this 2nd teaching re codependent arising points out that 'going' is codependent with a sense of a 'goer' and destination (a 'going to').... these three things codependently exist."

"It's not just the false 'self' that is being critiqued, but the 'apparent self-nature' of all things ... the band of thieves that codependently set each other up because we are not awake enough to catch them at their game.... Nagarjuna's point was to freshen up our view ... he wants our appreciation of life and reality to be fully opened up, not channeled by 'teaching' and habits of being, even conventionally-approved 'spiritual' ones."

During the workshop I interjected (somewhat gracelessly, I regret) this comment attributed to Confucius: "Stop listening with your ears and listen with your mind. Then stop listening with your mind and listen with your primal spirit. Hearing is limited to the ear. Mind is limited to tallying things up. But the primal spirit is empty: it's simply that which awaits things." My understanding of what Stim was saying is close to my understanding of the comment from Confucius. Stim asked us, as homework: "Can you see 'going', 'goer', 'gone to'? Can you see the way they interact, mutually reinforce each other's reality? Can you see the way their very arising is their emptiness?" The three questions have parallels in the three steps that Confucius noted: words arrive at our ears, where we begin to listen. Reacting to the sound may be instinctive. The next step is to listen with the mind, tallying up all of the interactions at play in our perceptions. Then, finally, stop listening with the mind and listen with our deeper spirit.

At a simple personal level, I see (perhaps inaccurately) an aspect of psychology here: how repetition compulsion arises from fixation. Sigmund Freud is said to have noted "the existence of an innate, instinctual tendency to repeat unpleasant experiences.... the concept of the repetition compulsion ... remained a clinical construct and became an important part of clinical psychoanalysis." Gifford, S. (1964) Repetition Compulsion, J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn., 12:632-649. This is noted with awareness of the modern rejection of Freudian psychology as a pessimistic and detrimental view of the limits of human nature. Nonetheless, it rings true in part, at least, in my experience, insofar as attachment to fixations gives rise to compulsive repetition.

This is also consistent with my understanding of traditional Chinese metaphysics, in the sense that it is said yin corruption leads to yang compulsion. At a personal level, yin corruption can be comparable to fixation. At the level of human nature, yin corruption also exists, in social constructs. Yang compulsion relates to unawakeness, in Stim's terms, insofar as mental or rational activity is compelled and repetitious.

For example, we may have an ingrained idea of socially derived roles appropriate for given conditions and those roles are continually emphasized in social interaction, and also continually acted out in the lives of most people within a given society. All these factors together exist as mutually dependent and reinforcing.

A mere sound, a voice, a word may stimulate an instinctive reaction. A tune may not be even noticed at the audible level, but we begin to hum along. Mental activity, reasoning and action may follow the deeply trod paths (the ruts) that are similarly created by past acts, and we may find ourselves stuck in those ruts even when our consciousness gives no clues that we are being compelled to repetitious activity.

If Confucius's saying has merit, we have a deeper spirit where emptiness allows us an opportunity to see fixations as fixations and ruts as ruts.