



Seeing Freedom in the Coming and Going of Life

Tuere Sala

It has been said that the next Buddha will be the sangha. The great Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh has said many times that “it is possible that the next Buddha may take the form of a community; a community practicing understanding and lovingkindness, a community practicing mindful living.” I often wonder how this could be possible. The Buddha – an enlightened being – would be a group, not one person. This Buddha would be a completely different type of being than what we can currently conceive. This all seems so poignant given the situation we now find ourselves in.

As you all know, Seattle Insight will be moving in the next two months. We will no longer look and feel like our current configuration. I have been through this several times before. When I initially came to Seattle Insight, we met on Monday nights in the basement of Keystone. Parking was awful and as we grew in popularity, I had to leave home earlier and earlier to find a spot. Then we moved to Beth Shalom and the weekly sit changed to Tuesday nights. I still remember the conversation I had with my choir members about leaving because I had to go to meditation. When we moved to St Marks I was in heaven. I was finally within walking distance. I still fondly remember the slow strolls home on warm nights, my mind swirling in thoughts of Dhamma. St Marks left such a mark on me that when we moved into the Dharma Center in SODO I hated it. It didn't feel anything like a meditation environment. It was too industrial, too much cement and not enough trees. Now, I can't imagine being anywhere else.

Changing locations has not been the only changes that have happened over my 17 years with Seattle Insight. I've seen the changing of faces, as if there have been many, many sanghas within one Seattle Insight. I've seen changes to visiting teachers. Ten years ago, I could barely wait for Steve Armstrong's nonresidential and now I feel that way about Venerable Pannavati (someone I didn't even know existed ten years ago). I've seen changes to my practice, having gone through periods of great anxiety, immense metta, and waves of calm and peacefulness. In fact, I had no idea it would even be possible that I would one day be a guiding teacher for the group that guided me for so long.

Sangha, which means community in Pali, can be thought of as the coming together and fading away of individual practitioners. This coming together and fading away is one of Buddha's central teaching on the three characteristics of existence. These three universal characteristics -- impermanence, dissatisfaction and not-self -- can be thought

of as the infrastructure of life. We don't always see this, but it is always present. Meditation practice strengthens our awareness of its presence in the whole of our experience. Gradually, we learn to see that this coming together and fading away brings both trust and freedom.

Through all the shifting and changing, Seattle Insight has remained a steadfast patron of the Dhamma. Thousands of practitioners have found refuge within our walls. And because of the financial generosity of these practitioners and the tireless efforts of hundreds of volunteers, we have remained a strong organization. I can see more and more why the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are considered gems. These beautiful jewels are formed deep in the earth, over the course of many years, with the coming together of various elements and minerals. Likewise, who and what Seattle Insight is today is because of the coming together and fading away that has taken place over the last 20+ years.

Finally, I don't think it is just a coincidence that we are spending the year with the Dhammas (five hindrances and seven factors of awakening). I think this move will bring up a lot of desire, aversion, restlessness, worry and doubt. We will need to remind each other that the hindrances are just the flip side of awakening. So, while I have some uncertainty about what is to come, I have an unshakable trust in the capacity of Seattle Insight to meet whatever comes with kindness and wisdom. We have been practicing this for 20+ years and it is as it should be on our journey towards awakening together.