

“Why” is the land of Monkeys

Those of you familiar with my discussions on Buddhism and more specifically the teachings on the awakening of the Buddha mind will also know of my frequent use of the Buddha’s analogy of our Mano-vijnana or human mind as the land of thousands of monkeys. These monkeys are constantly jumping, hanging, swinging from branch to branch as they all shout incessantly for our attention and devotion to our/their cravings. These cravings, desires, avarice, emotions, fears, longings, that we experience are all the function of these monkeys distracting us or being extremely clever in the task of only one thing; to make absolute our perception of self and other. To keep this dichotomy intact is the very survival of the monkeys. The Buddha realized that it was these monkeys that provided the essential dissolution from reality that plunges all life into suffering. Endless cravings for identity as separate from the natural order of life process is the fundamental delusion that provides for all manner of suffering, fear, cravings and the insatiable “I, me, mine, etc.”

You can see this predicament very early in child development. We laugh at it without understanding the fundamental problem at work. It is the continuous question of two to four year olds of “Why”. A litany of monkey quotes immediately spill from our mouths, all reinforcing that a “why” there must be! The, Why, in fact, is irrelevant. In fact it only leads to more questions of impulse that are once again the actions of the monkey mind. This becomes a circular rhetorical device that ends in exhaustion of suppositions as the monkeys grow weary and tired, as is their prerogative.

The “how”, would be a much more productive endeavor as this question deals with causation. This pattern of questioning attempts to reveal the structure of phenomena and thereby the possible patterns of actions leading to a phenomenon. This exercise can lead to useful insights and recognition of karmic tendencies, so as to better disassemble them in meditation. This can also be a trap however, if we forget the objective in meditation is to “Quell the formations of the body” (the causal chains that manifest the monkeys etc...), to prevent their recurrence; and NOT to understand or embrace them.

In fact, we don’t want to focus our attention on the thought at all, but rather to see beneath it to what holds it up, what constructs its *formation*. So that, like the monkey analogy, we can “see” the branch, and make it cease to be, and then further the tree that holds the branch and quell it also into non-existence, and then the ground in which the tree manifests and cease its constant rebirth from moment to moment until it too ceases to *arise* in the mind.

Rhetoric is important here. This is the entirety of the teachings of Buddhism. That is, to understand deeply the *FORMATIONS* of all phenomena. It is only in the teachings of the last eight years of the Buddha's lifetime that a complete picture of practice would come full circle to what he was trying to explain in the first 21 days after his own awakening. And it was only with the ensuing elucidations of Nāgārjuna in the first century and Vasubandhu in the fourth and Tien-Tai in the sixth and finally with Nichiren in the 13th century, that all the pieces of the puzzle were in place but only required popular understanding.

Understanding impermanence and Anatman, the 5 aggregates and Nidana (causal chains), the three existences and the 3000 realms in a single thought moment; all teachings of the massive forces leading to "becoming", and then the ten worlds in mutual possession, the ten factors, all aspects of instantiation and manifestation of the great energies of the life process bringing all phenomena into physical duality experienced, ultimately revealed in the Lotus Sutra.

Now it can be observed that the Buddha's teachings are entirely designed to give us the tools, the Mind Tools, to fundamentally understand HOW to use our human minds to deconstruct the vastly complex functioning of our human ego/mind. From the simple analogy of the monkeys jumping from branch to branch to looking beneath their supports to the calming or quelling of the **formation** of those bodies (phenomena), we are made deeply aware of the structures of how ALL phenomena, physical, emotional, or imagined come to "exist" or **arise** in our human minds.

To quell the formation of all phenomena is to release the mind from the monkeys. And if the monkeys are silenced, then the causal chains of the Alaya consciousness go dormant; and without the avarice of these causal chains (karma), our human minds are free to experience life without influence, prejudice, judgement or fears. This is liberation of suffering and the stated goal of Buddha.