

Sitting Ducks

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The other day I was talking with someone left reeling by a recent incident, and we both recognized that in this human condition we are as sitting ducks waiting to be shot down by passing conditions which stir up old belief-tendencies. Until we grasp the fundamental position of training that these conditions are compassionate expressions bringing us the opportunity to purify the heart of some latent, tender remainder from old painful experiences, we won't appreciate their value and learn from them. It helps to understand that we reacted in ways that seemed appropriate at the time and then these became part of our conditioned repertoire when relating to our world.

Our wonderful practice shines the beautiful light of awareness onto this dance, allowing us to see how powerful our wonted steps propel us into perpetuating the very distress we want to flee from and reject. Layers of these habitual tendencies can be peeled off through our *willingness to feel* their effects and to learn how to embrace them instead of turn away. It is helpful to remember that this is the karmic baggage *all* of us carry and that the very *purpose* of this present precious life is to recognize their ephemeral unreality in order to be able *to let them go*. Truly, they are not 'us,' they are no-thing. By mistake, beings in our karmic stream *judged themselves* as unworthy, believing in their separateness from That which truly embraces all, and thus they continued the beginningless turning of the Samsaric Wheel, the wheel of birth and death, life after life after life. All these beings whose karma we've inherited looked for stability, peace, and true joy just as we do, but they were mistakenly searching for the 'right' *external* situations that would bring resolution. Recognizing this, we could cry as Patrick Henry did in voting for the U.S. colonies to revolt from the British Empire, "Peace, peace, there is no peace."

It is useful to remember that our recognition of this plight is the *fruit* of the long past searching, just as the U.S. colonies tried repeatedly to placate and reason with the British Empire for their right not to be taxed without representation, before finally standing up to an *empire*. And just as those few colonials couldn't be sure they would not be decimated by their British rulers when they made the fate-full decision to rebel, we can't know what the outcome of our 'rebellion' against strongly entrenched habitual tendencies will be. We have to be willing to face this fear, each for ourselves, to understand the heroic courage required to truly open to the feelings triggered when 'all conditions ripen.' We learn the truth Rev. Master Jiyu was given in her early training in Japan, that in our spiritual practice "We are standing *against* the world [of our mind, of our entrenched and hidden beliefs] in order to train in wisdom."

So the very substance of training that we come to understand is how we are as 'sitting ducks' through our *willingness* not to hide behind old protective barriers, and hence to *look* at life afresh. This is as difficult as it is freeing. And only by our willingness to thus expose ourselves to life situations without trying to get away from those that bring discomfort and terrible doubt, will we come to truly be able to "make the Buddha's Truth one with ourselves." The miracle of our training is that when we *are* thus willing to do our part, we open to the immensity of Eternal Life which has always been our True Refuge. Over and over again, when we're willing to be 'shot down' by conditions that stir up the latent fragility of 'me,' we unmask the lie that has dogged us—that mistaken wrong *view* that we are separate from the Flow of Immaculacy and have a need to protect ourselves.