

Looking and Seeing

Extract taken from 'The Happy Twins: Dzogchen and Mahamudra'¹

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Just looking - not looking *for* something

In the English language we can say that we are looking *for* something or listening *for* something. But in this practice we are simply looking or hearing. The seeing or the hearing is what arises in the mirror of your mind.

If you go into the more active 'looking *for* something' you are already tilted towards judgement. For example when there is a noise the aspect of hearing is likely to arise. Someone bangs a door outside. Immediately you have the interpretation: the making sense of what you heard. But what you heard was a sound and the sound doesn't need any interpretation. The reason you are going into making sense of the sound is because you are used to listening *for* something. The hearing receptivity of sound has become organised into this pattern formation of making sense of things, putting a label on things, putting them in their place; comparing and contrasting what is safe, what is dangerous, what is for me, what is not for me. The mental busyness becomes quickly activated.

We sit with eyes open and we see. What do we see? We don't know, we just see. We don't see anything. As soon as you see 'something' you have added 'something' to seeing; seeing doesn't see anything. When you hear, you hear sound. What was that sound? Another thing.

¹. Two texts were studied on this retreat. The Mirror of Luminous Revelation (from Nuden Dorje Drophan Lingpa) and The Mahamudra Middle Way of the Ganges (from Tilopa)

Earlier we were looking at the five questions which lead us into understanding that the mind doesn't belong in the family of objects which are in samsara. Everything else can get a positive answer to these five questions but the mind somehow doesn't fit.

There are other questions we ask (What? How? Where? When? Why?) which go towards us forming a position. When we pose these questions there is the sense that there will be an answer. When is lunch? Where will lunch be? What will be for lunch? Some event, yet to happen, can be shaped through the asking of these questions. The question is tilting us towards the formation of an answer. That is the important thing since now we are already slightly disposed towards structuring.

When we go for lunch there is always The Mystery of the Soup. The answer to The Mystery is written on the blackboard. You smell it, but what do you smell? Not necessarily a defining question but anyway we smell something. We see, but what do we see? Some consistency and colour, but what is it? What do you think is in the soup? Maybe this, maybe that. What is it? That is an additive, written often on a blackboard...

When you shop you may look at the packet to read if there are e-additives and help you decide whether to buy it. When you ask what is in the soup, that is an additive. Leave the soup as it is without additives, without thought. The soup doesn't need your thought, your naming, your interpretation, or your mobilisation or your whole semiotic frame. We are fairly certain that there is no poisoner cooking in the kitchen, therefore we don't need to know.

It is very interesting to look into these questions: 'What time is it?' Do I need to know? And what is time anyway? 'Oh, it's almost one o'clock.' That is a formalisation of time – a twenty-four-hour clock that we have split into two halves of twelve and twelve. Not all time systems in the world operate in that way, Twenty-four hours is a convention. When we reply, 'Oh, it's almost one.' we mobilise into the belief of the meaningfulness of the conventional term, and then we are in the realm of ideas.

Again and again, observe these tilts towards appropriation and consolidation: Why? How? What? Where? Where are we? We are in this village. Really? That's just one idea. 'Oh, but I know the name of the village.' That's another idea. If you don't tell yourself where you are, you are still here. Koans are exactly on this point: the student is trying to answer the koan by adding in their thoughts. They take up the koan as a question that can be answered by putting in additives. Who is sitting in front of me? Me. Where is the sky? I don't know anything.

The practice is to help us become aware of our tendency to grasp, to consolidate, to shape, and then to rely on that to build an edifice. You can do this whenever you like: just observe and bring yourself closer to who is there. You are here, so be with being here. There is nothing else to do except be here, wherever here is, and whatever is happening. As it says, whatever comes, comes. Don't go

into interpretation or worry. If these things happen, then that is what is happening. This is so tricky and so subtle. We tilt into it so much, so just try to keep a little eye on that.

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Have you ever been seen?

Yesterday we were reflecting on the difference between looking and seeing. *[Note: extracted above.]* Seeing, or opening to, is clearly a major part of our practice. I want to raise some questions again that I invite you to reflect on, not with other people, but just with yourself for a few minutes.

The first question is: Have you ever been seen? What would it mean for you?

Were you seen by your mother? Were you seen by your father? Surely they saw someone? Were you the one that they saw? It goes back to this notion of projection, the interpretation of who is there. What do you feel like if you're seen or not seen?

You probably have some memories of school where some teachers saw you a bit more than others. If a teacher really didn't see you, but seemed to take against you for no good reason, was that uncomfortable? Could you break through the veil of their hostility? You can look at this a bit further.

You can also look at how you physically manifest. Has somebody actually really seen how your body is? How it moves, how it breathes? What is it like to be in eye contact? What is the range of your eye contact? Can people read from your body whether they can move forward or not? Our body often gives ambivalent messages. Do we want? Do we not want? Do we desire? Do we not desire? Can somebody be with you in that uncertainty?

Look at the realm of clarity. **When you are open and have the sense of how it is, have you been seen or met in that arena?** Can your intuitive response be in harmony with other people? Has anyone seen you in the infinity of your presence? Of course they would see you as an object, but do you feel that there has been a welcome and an openness on their side?

Most of the time, in interpersonal meetings, people have an agenda. We are shopping, we are looking for something, we feel some deficit in ourselves, some lack from our childhood, some longing, some desire that the other person will make us whole, and so on. That kind of shopping list is important because it tends to get in the way of being seen. Have you ever felt in your open availability that someone has been there with you without an agenda?

The last question is, **'Have you ever seen someone else?'** Have you ever truly seen someone? Have you very quickly taken them for granted and pulled them into your frame of reference or assumption? Have you assumed that they are going to be like this or that. Have you placed them in

the game plan of your life, so that things go on? Or is there something amazing in that perception that then dissolves your game plan?

These are important questions to ask yourself because although you say that you want to work for the benefit of all beings, all beings are not the same; it is not as if they are homogenised in a factory. Beings all have their differences so we have to be able to see them particularly on these three registers. If I am going to be for the other, I need to find a way of being available to all the registers of another person. I need to be able to take more and give out more. So it is important to think about whether I cut myself off and close down and how I do that.

We live with constructs. Many children become antagonistic to their parents because they have built up a negative image of how the parent is, and so they never really see the parent. The parent is an image in their mind compounded out of hurts, wounds and grievances, having been sent to bed early, and so on. The fourth of the five skandhas is constructedness, associations, creation. It is this patterning that we are often encountering when we encounter other people. We encounter our idea of them which makes a mockery of wisdom and compassion. It is not that we are bad or wrong for doing that; we are not about entering into judgment. It is just about observing how we build up the resources that we have for apprehending a person and thinking about how the story is built up.

A doctor will listen to someone in a different way from a policeman. All professionals who work with people are trained to a particular form of triage, of sifting and sorting of information. They are looking out for some things that they take to be significant, and they disregard other things. We encounter this process with most people we meet. Even good-hearted people who seem kind and caring have a kind of tilt; they filter out or over-privilege certain aspects. If we want to give people the welcome that would help them, it needs to be a very deep and infinite welcome.