

Being completely human – secular buddhism, and beyond

An eight-part course using recorded talks by Stephen Batchelor & Roshi Joan Halifax given at Upaya Zen Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, 25 through 29 March 2015

Discussion 7 of 8

Meeting 7: Part 10 (61:36) Stephen Batchelor and Joan Halifax; Q & A

1. Batchelor remarks that seemingly incessant thought (whether subdued background chatter or hyper-charged foreground, whether non-reactive discursiveness or reactive discursiveness) is the raw material of practice. What is the distinction that Batchelor advises practitioners to attend to? What does he suggest one look for, allowing one to get a read on the nature of the distraction?
2. Roshi Joan remarks that the space in which thought is non-adhesive is recognised through ‘meet[ing] that weed in its incipient form’. Paraphrase her remark. What is she pointing at?
3. How does Roshi Joan’s observation segue into her statement: ‘the neural networks that are associated with our capacity to sense into our [own] visceral experience are the same neural networks associated with our capacity to sense into the experience of another’? What is the connection between ‘meeting the weed in its incipient form’ and the capacity to sense into our own visceral experience and so, the experience of another?
4. What is to be gained through taking the view that ‘it doesn’t really matter what is happening inside. Just look good.’? What is cultivated through taking this view, i.e. practicing this method? Give an example to illustrate your answer.

5. In his response to the question ‘what is *karma*?’, the Buddha answers that ‘*karma* is action.’ And ‘what is action?’ ‘Action is intention’. Distinguish the difference between this classical description of action and consequences (i.e. an observable psychological operation) from the popular notion of karma as the underlying law that accounts for the way things are.
6. Given that ‘intention (*cetanā*) is a necessary constituent of any conscious moment’, that we consciously incline toward a given response (which is inclusive of instinctive reactions and deliberate choices), what is the import of *cetanā* in the cultivation of mindfulness?
7. What is the distinction between intention and aspiration? What is their relationship?
8. In response to the question on near enemies, Batchelor remarks that experientially, distinguishing mental moments is difficult. Roshi Joan adds that we typically face a multiplicity of near and far enemies. Based on their exchange, how would you define near and far enemies? Give an example of each to illustrate your definition.
9. Following on Batchelor’s response to a questioner who asked ‘where do you find hope in light of our current ecological/economic/social crises?’, Roshi Joan counters that it is hope that weakens one as opposed to acting without hope, acting without an attachment to outcome, i.e. ‘staying until not only the end but after the end’. What does Roshi state is the fruit of such action? What is the intention that fuels the stamina to act without hope?
10. Consider Batchelor’s response to the question on self when he states that it is our reification of self as something fixed and permanent that is the problem. What is Batchelor’s point here with respect to the Buddha’s teachings on *anatta* as they were later developed and commented upon.