



The potential is there, let's use it! (Croizet, 2005)

Awakening to Sanity (letter 13)

Everyone can awaken

Dear friend,

One may ask: Is it true that everyone can awaken, even someone as limited as me?

Well, none of the realized masters seem to ever doubt the possibility that everyone can awaken. They say: One just needs to have a mind, the capacity to be aware. Wherever there is awareness there is the potential to awaken – and this even includes non-humans. In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition this potential has been named “Buddha nature”. Every sentient being is said to possess that basic potential to become a fully awakened being by the simple fact of having a mind that can be aware. The real ‘cause’ of awakening is the potential for complete awareness which is inherent to mind. This potential is thus said to be inherent to all beings “just as butter is inherent to milk” (Mahaparinirvanasutra).

The experience behind these statements is that the mind of awakened ones like the Buddha and the mind of ordinary beings are of the same basic nature. Those who awaken remember how confused they were before they learned to let their mind be naturally open; they were clinging and suffering the same way as everyone else. Initially the awakened ones felt just as confused as we might feel today and we can take from their experience that their mind was not intrinsically different from ours. Then, allowing their mind to open and blossom by not interfering with its basic qualities, they realized mind to be aware by itself, lucid and dynamic. When that dynamic, lucid awareness is freed from grasping it shows to be the source of all true qualities like love, understanding and so on – they are sometimes called the qualities of Buddha nature. Those qualities are inherent to a fluid, completely open mind and they show naturally in everyone fully awakened.

We should always remember that the Buddha nature as well as its qualities is nothing substantial; everything is process, nothing ever stays. Only the 'taste' of each and every changing experience as being ungraspable is ever present: qualities spontaneously manifest within that basic ungraspable nature of mind. The experience of unobstructed awareness – just as it is, without interference – is the same for everyone. Sentient beings are different only insofar as some have awakened to it and others not; but everyone has the potential to awaken.

We can awaken because our mind – far from being substantial – is a constant process of experience and nothing can permanently obstruct or cloud basic awareness. When dualistic perception with its clinging to subject and object falls away, nondual awareness is experienced as being the very nature, the very taste of all life experiences. This awareness is without a centre, without the notion of a "self" separate from the rest – and that experience seems to be the same across all cultures and spiritual traditions. Suchness is thus said to be the same everywhere.

And there is still more good news: Human history shows that individuals from within all strata of society, even those with lives of terrible suffering and confusion or with the most outrageous behaviour have been able to enter Awakening. This includes criminals like serial killers and their victims, tyrannical kings and their subjects, people with history of deep psychosis or depression, people previously involved in black magic, millionaires as well as beggars, priests as well as prostitutes, non-Buddhists as well as Buddhists, educated people as well as uneducated. Even if temporarily our potential to awaken is completely overshadowed, there is always the possibility that changing circumstances and beneficial acts will stimulate our inherent potential and enable us to engage in a path of awakening up to the full result. Thus everyone is said to possess the possibility to awaken.

Again, with the best wishes for a beautiful day,

Tilman Lhundrup

PS. Those who have read Gampopa might have noticed that this was a summary of the first half of the first chapter in his "Ornament of Liberation".

(corrected by Andy)