

Dharma talk  
7/12/14

### The Useless Eyebrows (told by Ven. Master Hsing-Yun)

Once, a person's eyes, nose, and mouth had a meeting. First the eyes said, "We, the eyes, are of utmost importance to the body. Everything must be seen by us to know whether it is beautiful or not, big or small, tall or short. Without eyes, walking around will be very difficult. So we, the eyes, are very important. But we have been improperly placed under the eyebrows, which are of no use. It is just not fair!"

Next, the nose said, "I, the nose, am the most important. Only I can distinguish a good smell from a foul odor. The act of breathing is also dependent on me. If I do not let the breath pass through, everybody will die. So I am the most important. As important as I am, I have been unfairly placed beneath the useless eyebrows. I am most unhappy."

Then the mouth said, "I am the most important part of the human body. I can speak; if not for me, there would not be any communication among people. I take in the food; if not for me, everybody would die of hunger. Such an important part as myself has been placed in the lowest part of the face. The useless eyebrows, however, have been put on the highest part of the face. This I cannot accept!"

After the others had spoken, the eyebrows spoke slowly, "Please do not fight anymore. We, the eyebrows, are surely the most useless things; we admit defeat. We are willing to be placed below you." Having said this, the eyebrows settled down below the eyes. Unfortunately, the person no longer looked like a human being. Next, they eyebrows settled down below the nose. It was still horrible; it still did not look like a human being. Then the eyebrows settled down below the mouth. This looked even more ghastly! The eyes, nose, and mouth huddled to discuss the situation again. They concluded that it was best if the eyebrows returned to their original place on the face; it was the most appropriate spot for them. When the eyebrows returned to their original spot, the appearance was once again that of a human being. Thus, we can see that what appears to be the most useless thing can be indeed the most useful.

How do we included everything and everyone, every breeze, every sneeze, every itch, every pain, as essential?

I am better than no one; I am less than no one; I am no one's equal.

How to be, in this moment, inclusively?

No one moment or sensation of value over another....

At the same time training the mind to be awake

Awake equally to all phenomena

At the same time knowing it is transient

Nothing to push away as invaluable, and nothing to hold onto as if it should be permanent....

Even these eyebrows....

They are growing white and sparse.

So how to give equal value to aging and the aged, as an essential part of what makes us human.

And to babies,

and pensive, moody, defensive teenagers?

To to the ever present internal processes those periods of time have left within us.  
Can we include them as worthy to be known?

With our need to be known and loved and accepted, or our capacity to be defiant and moody?

All these states need to be included by us; we need to embrace all these parts.

Without discrimination.

Within this meditation.

In each moment as they available.

And their very transience make them equally necessary and valuable. Each a reflection something important about being human.

At the same time, in light of eventual death, what is their importance?

What is truly essential?

The knowledge of our own death makes the clarity of this moment, the birds calling, the feel of the air in the room, amazing just for the life they contain. Just the awake-ness itself is luminescent.

I took my 89 year old mother back to assisted living after being away for three weeks because of a medical emergency. People there have a way of disappearing and you never know what happens to them because of the privacy laws. And there are some amazing friendships there--dinner table discussions of what they want to wear in their coffins. And it is not idle chatter. It is real to them. When I took my mother back yesterday, her friend caught her hand and held it tenderly. And she was deeply moved by his caring. You are alive. We are both alive. They held each other's hands and they were joyful and still.

What was truly important was present in that room.

And made palpable because they knew it was precious.

We are awake.

We are alive within these bodies.

And every moment is essential.

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