

Sangha as Shared Blindness

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Sangha is the gathering of practitioners of the Way, the assembly of pilgrims without progress, whose humanity and imperfections are laid bare on the altar of impermanence.

Within such *temenos*, or sacred field, our potential for true communication is realized. What makes communication at all possible are our wounds and imperfections, the courage to admit one's inherent sense of inferiority. Inherent because, as Alfred Adler reminds us, vulnerability, helplessness and inferiority are part and parcel of the human condition from the very moment we enter this world at birth.

What we may discover is that at the core of our inherent vulnerability there is a sense of not-knowing. A sangha may provide at first a refuge where vulnerability, not-knowing and innate hopelessness can be openly admitted; where the non-true existence of the self can be safely verified. Facing up to the inherent groundlessness of existence is a terrifying experience for which a practitioner needs support and encouragement. Going alone is hazardous, as we know from many great troubled minds.

Communication is possible when there is an exposed wound, a laceration, a show of imperfection. There is no possibility of communication between any number of solid, self-sufficient beings.

On one level, we are completely alone. On another level, we are completely inter-dependent. This is not the inter-dependence of mechanized modern living, where a certain degree of satisfaction and even a perverse, quiet joy is gained in absolving specialized, highly automated tasks: the grey, saturnine contentment of being another brick in the wall of society.

In this case the task, and the intrinsic function of the individual, is merely functional. Useful cannon fodder, given the stony reward of a tasteless monument to the glorious dead.

Communication is altogether different. There we find the potential for friendship and love, when these noble words are not tainted with mutual self-gratification and

game-playing in the vast chessboard of serviceable living. In communication we share our discontinuity, we feel courageous enough to admit our ignorance, our utter blindness.

A sangha is a community where one can be oneself, i.e., where one can safely admit one's powerlessness, inner darkness, not-knowing; one's smallness when placed in front of the vast mystery of the universe. On a wider level of course, the Indra net of interdependence connects one to everyone and everything. But society at large is *institutionalised mediocrity* - it needs to be so, in order to carry out its functional, historical fiction - the show must go on, at *any* cost.

A sangha, a community of practitioners of the Dharma, is a place of shared blindness. I don't know, you don't know, and we practice together

our precious ignorance. Elsewhere one can build and build, pile up knowledge as a barricade against the elements, against the menace of incumbent death.

One is free to play the game, to be lost in the game, or to play knowing that it is a game - i.e. that the knowledge gained is ultimately empty, that the bulwark cannot resist the high-waters, and that in fact it would be a disaster if it did.

Sangha could be a place of solace. So many great and troubled spirits will find kindred hearts and burning embers. Great plants growing together in utter aloneness, yet in subtle, mutually nourishing communion.

Great solace comes from the acceptance that it is absolutely fine to reveal one's ignorance and hopelessness. Then communication flows, friendship is possible, the *star friendship* Nietzsche writes about in the *Gay Science*, the cold river of love running in the stars' trajectory, and also the warm-heartedness that flows spontaneously between those who have gained enough strength and independence to afford *dana*, generosity.

One might come to a sangha at first with wanting something - quenching one's thirst, finding a temporary fix to a problem. , within and without the human sphere.

Sooner or later the question is reversed, it becomes: "How can I give something?"

That something is then realized as one's life, and at its core the gnawing unquenchable sense of not-knowing, that inner blindness that deepens and deepens as one grows more mature.

In this context, the Romantics' idea of the person of genius is re-valued and re-written in Adlerian key. The person of genius, whether or not a solitary hermit, is a human being who is supremely useful, no longer in a mechanical, utilitarian mode, subservient to the logic of the machine, but one who contributes to the wider domain of culture