

Continua of Practice Series

CONTINUA OF PRACTICE: FROM BLAME TO ACCOUNTABILITY

by Rodney Smith | August 18, 2015

“Awakening: A Paradigm Shift of the Heart,” will deepen your understanding of these talks.

We There are three central reasons we get lost in our spiritual journey despite the rigor with which we practice and the sincerity of our purpose. The first is that we do not know the direction the journey takes and we get lost in the sideshows and entertainment of the process. Asking questions that we may assume to know but have not fully understood can redirect us back to the central intent. Questions like, “What does samadhi have to do with insight?” or “How does following my breath evolve into open awareness, and what does open awareness have to do with the end of suffering?” Anything left unexamined will eventually take away your focus. The second reason many of us go astray is because we attempt to move forward using the unconscious paradigm. For instance, any assumptions coming from “I, me, or mine” keep our unstated motivations lurking in the shadows of the unconscious. Unconscious assumptions that drive our motivation end up creating havoc with our intended purpose. And the third reason we easily go astray is because our stated objective and our dharma intention are at cross-purposes. Only our heart knows what we really want and to pretend a different motivation is counterproductive. What do you really want from your dharma practice in general and what is your aim for this meditation period specifically?

This week we will scrutinize a particular self-destructive tendency that many of us use to hold external situations and people accountable for our shortcomings. In doing so we say to the world, “you are culpable for everything I lack, and in this way, I never have to face or grow into my shortcomings.” It is obvious that we can only progress so far, both as human beings or as spiritual aspirants, as long as this tendency persists, but few of us work effectively to end these projections. We continue blaming others because the pain of owning our behavior is too unsettling. When aversion becomes the driver of our actions we can be certain that we are governed by the unconscious mind. The movement from the need to blame toward the willingness to hold ourselves accountable is a continuum that demonstrates our spiritual maturity as clearly as any indicator. In fact, the right side of the continuum, taking accountability or living without projection to its finality, is identical to selfless realization.

Accountability confronts two defense mechanisms that limit conscious awareness: denial and self-aversion. Denial is our unwillingness to accept what is true and self-aversion is our tendency to idealize our human condition. Both can be summed up as imaginary distortions of life. Self-idealism is encouraged within this culture and destructively carried within us, and we simply dismiss situations, experiences, or states of mind that do not fit the narrow corridor of our imposed images. Freedom is moving beyond our need for self-protection and eliminating the boundaries that burden our lives. As we release ourselves from this set of conditions the world rejoins itself as a continuous whole, and we rejoin ourselves as part of that totality.

One of the false nirvanas of this continuum comes when we realize the utter joy of moving beyond our set beliefs into a more conscious expression of ourselves. As with any expression of our practice, we can become rather dogmatic and unyielding in our need to pressure others to follow our example, and it is here that we can easily get caught up in the belief that our practice is the “only way.” The counter-influence is the realization that taking any stand upon our practice robs us of further accountability.



See [Series Overview](#) for a description of this diagram.

FOR YOUR CONTEMPLATION

Third Zen Patriarch offers a simple exercise to bring us back to the reality of non-separation. Just say, “Not two,” when reactions arise. This week use this exercise to interrupt your need to project blame onto others. In the middle of your struggle to self-defend, pause, soften your edges, and realign your heart and mind to the truth of accountability. In this pause of restraint, you will see a choice to live this moment spiritually integrated or continue to reinforce the struggle of self and other.

This series is based on the book, "[Awakening: A Paradigm Shift of the Heart](#)" (Shambhala 2014).