

Spring's Luminous Tab
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About a week ago or so, I was walking around my neighborhood, which has all deciduous trees. This time of year it's pretty bare. It felt like there was something slightly different about the landscape. It took me a while to see what it was because it was so subtle. I realized that on many of the trees and bushes, there were small swellings that had begun on the branches. Not buds or anything close to buds, but just the swelling on the twigs, and the buds would appear soon. I was astonished at the difference it made in how the landscape felt, how much fuller just those small swellings made things. It made me think of how spring lies latent in late winter.

Somehow it's just under the surface, just under the horizon, and is held in the branches, in the earth, but will any second now burst forth. Much of what we've been speaking about in terms of awakening is like that — becoming intimate, which is one of the ways the old Chinese people talked about it. Becoming intimate is not something that belongs just to us; we don't *get* enlightenment or *have* realization, but we are able to *become* intimate, and we are *in* intimacy — it is in us, the field of our lives — in that moment we become intimate. That seems very spring-like to me.

This morning when I was awakened by the tiny chirping of a bird nearby, I was suddenly flooded with a memory of all the summer mornings in Santa Fe, before the heat of the day has set in, when the birds are singing and swooping around and the air is so clear and cool, and you're pulled outside, at least onto the porch, and maybe out for a long walk in the cool of the day. I thought the little chirping of the bird that had filled me with memories of so many beautiful Santa Fe mornings was like a luminous tab in the moment. If I pulled that luminous tab then suddenly I was intimate and suddenly there was a freedom in everything. The sound of that small bird brought a freedom to my waking up to the sounds outside : the guy honking his horn down the street for his kids to come out so he could take them to school, all of it, completely free because in that moment, as in every moment, there is a luminous tab we can find and pull.

Sometimes the tab is not so obvious. It's not so pleasant as a bird's call, and we have to supply it ourselves. That's why we have the koans. We have this way of inquiry we use because it's a kind of portable luminous tab that can be applied in any moment, no matter how difficult.

In the koan salon yesterday, someone was talking about a moment when a friend was angry with her, she was angry with them, and suddenly she had a desire to say the unsayable thing — the thing that once you say you can't ever go back — because she needed to see what would happen if she did. Someone in the salon made the typical, time-honored Buddhist move and said, "One thing you can do with that is investigate the anger and the desire to see what will happen if you say that." And yes that's true, and time-honored, and great. And it's also true that the koan way offers us another kind of inquiry. The koan question in such a moment is, *Who needs to know?* — with the emphasis on the *Who?*

That's a completely loopy question. It makes no sense whatsoever. It's not careful and conscientious and appropriate. It's just nutty, but that's what's valuable. There's a way in which, if we respond to the situation with a crazy unexpected thing like *Who needs to know?*, we can tilt things slightly, we can change the frame just enough where suddenly there are courses of action that appear that were completely invisible just a few moments ago. But we do it in a way that is meeting the vividness of life with the vividness of our own heart-minds. We're saying, *Yeah, we'll play.* I'll bring my own luminous tab, I'll pull it, and I'll ask this crazy question, *Who needs to know?*, and then I'll see what happens.

That also speaks to another thing we've been talking a lot about, which is our participation in the creation of the world. The world is an ongoing, moving, changing creation that we're participating in whether we intend to or not, or mean to or not. What is it like to choose to participate? What is it like to become part of this co-creation of the world?

The American psychologist and philosopher William James was one of the founders of a school of philosophy called Pragmatism. When he was explaining what pragmatism was he said that, fundamentally, for pragmatists, reality is not set. Reality is still happening, it's still growing and changing. He said, "The universe is still having its adventures." I love that because it's such a Walt Whitmanesque image, that the universe is a Walt Whitman character, striding through the fields still having his adventures and praising what there is to praise and lamenting what there is to lament, and throwing himself down under the trees to sleep under

the stars, enjoying his own body through the bodies of many others. I like to think of the universe that way.

William James said if the universe is still happening, still unfolding, if it's still being created, then what we do, how we act and change, is the universe acting and changing. It's not different. He said, "Our acts, our turning places, where we seem to ourselves to make ourselves and grow, why may they not be the actual turning places and growing places of the world? Why not the workshop of being, where we catch fact in the making?"

That seems to me a very spring-like view of our lives. One of the things that happens when we meet in meditation as we will this weekend for koan retreat, is that we slow down enough and get quiet enough to see this workshop of being, which right now at this season is gearing up for the busy part of the year. We catch that in the making. We see how it unfolds. And we see how we participate in it and how we sometimes withhold our participation in it.

The old texts talked about everything preaching the Dharma all the time. I don't think that meant everything haranguing all the time, it was more the sense of everything participating — everything being part of this workshop of being.

Another way they talked about it was as scrolls unrolling. Every time we act, a sutra scroll unrolls. Every time we take a step, a scroll of sutras unrolls before us. Everything is unrolling these scrolls all the time, and the world is made up of these scrolls; the world is a giant story made up of all these individual chapters.

As we move from winter into spring, I commend to your attention the workshop of being. And I commend to your attention the miraculous condition that there is something rather than nothing. Stephen Hawking has often asked, "Why does the universe go through the bother of existing?" Well, thank heavens it does. And thank heavens we have the ability to experience that, to have our own adventure inside of the great adventure. Keep looking for those luminous tabs in every moment. Keep pulling them, keep finding first the intimacy and then the freedom that the intimacy brings.

Thank you. I'm glad to hear any questions or comments you might have.

Q1 : I was driving to Albuquerque. I'd been told that my car had mechanical problems, and I noticed as I was driving that I was nervous because I was anticipating something happening. My muscles were tight. My foot was moving. I was wound up. Then I said,

“Who’s nervous?” And I thought about who was creating this state, and I realized it could just stop, just fall away. Suddenly I realized that the landscape was there and other cars were there. It was like I went into the world in a sense, yet there was no ‘me’ in it. I’m doing that practice a lot now. Talk about co-creation — you’re co-creating with what’s happening in your field, in a sense. But if you’re just in the ‘I’, you don’t cross that line, so you’re an isolated being (with tight muscles!) The difference is clear to me. It’s a nice situation when you’re aware of the landscape. So thanks for that.

JIS : Thanks, that’s great. I love that story.

Thank you all very much.