

Lojong #5 part 2  
November 14, 2021

The path to awakening sometimes seems to be a very long journey, and we wish we could have an idea of what would be the ETA. And we cannot really have an ETA, you know, estimated time of awakening, we can't have this. But what we can see in our mind, our attitude, our behavior, is some significant changes. They're pointing out that we are in a good direction, progress has been made, and we just have to keep going.

One of these signals is that we are more and more trustworthy, in the sense that we can trust ourselves more and more. We usually have two weaknesses in anything; what the world sees of what we do, that's the outer witness, and what we know of what we do, that's the inner witness. A sign of progress is when we can see that we don't need so much to have external approval to feel okay, or to feel that we're on a good path; in a way we become more independent, which doesn't mean stubborn and closed to any advise of guidance, but the inner witness becomes more and more reliable. For a long time the inner witness has been like the naughty child that has been misleading us, like, "yeah, you can do that, that's cool." And now we realize that this inner witness has grown up, and is much more reliable; that's an absolute sign of progress. It has a very interesting side benefit which is we don't depend on others. We can be with others, we can listen to what people have to say about what we should do, we have to think about it, and we have to say, "thank you, yes," or "thank you, no." And we decide for ourselves, and we feel good about it. There's a sense of independence. We declare our independence. I don't need anybody to approve of me, I don't have to freak people out by being crazy in my way of being, but I don't have to always ask or beg for some sign of approval from the outer world.

This will never be clear anyway. Signs of approval are always connected to what people who approve of you will get in return. What do you have to give them so that they can trade their approval with that thing? So it's always tainted with some sort of business deal. And if you're constantly depending on others then people know you're weak and they can play you and use you for their personal agenda. When you're more confident with yourself and your own decisions and the way you're gonna lead your life, some people might be a little bit annoyed with that, because they can't push you around and so they can't bend you to serve their purpose or their intention. So you might lose some friends; were they friends? It doesn't really matter. So that's a great sign of progress, when the inner witness becomes reliable. So you don't need to depend on others, you can be with them even more so because you're not expecting anything.

You know, I was in charge of a monastery for seventeen or more years, and part of my job was fundraising. It was very uncomfortable to ask for anything for myself. I had spent years in retreat and of course I needed some friends and sponsors who had agreed to contribute to my retreat time. And I came to the time during my first retreat where I had no more money, and the secretary of the monastery said we're not going to kick you out of the three year retreat but you really have to do

something. I had to write letters and ask people, and this was excruciating. But when I was in charge of the monastery and had to go out and raise like a million dollars for the budget, and ask for help from donors; it was easy because I was not asking for myself, not asking for a favor. But I was listening to donors because you can only interest somebody to give if what you have corresponds to what they want to support and want to give to; you can't force them into giving. And so most of my fundraising strategy with the big donors, you know the rule of the 80/20, 20% of the people give 80% of the money, so the 20%, you can't talk about money with them, you can't go there and say, "we need this, can you help us?" No, you get together and create a relationship of a friendly nature, and exchange, and listen to their stories and interests, and at some point they enjoy the exchange and are nourished by the exchange and see that there is something that can be really good for them in this, and then in the last two minutes they say, "how can I help you?" Then you must be ready of course to tell them what you need. I remember once when we had a major project, spending three days with a major donor and talking about this and that, visiting the countryside where they lived and having a nice dinner in a good restaurant and then after all this discussion when we never talked about any money other than introducing them to the ideas about the project, this person said, "how much money do you need?" And I said, "well, we need two million dollars over three years." "Okay." That's it. Let's talk about something else, let's move on.

So you can do this because you don't have a horse in the race. If you're depending on other people because the inner witness is not stable then you become fragile, you can become prey. People say, "yeah, I'm gonna help you," like in the story of Pinocchio, this guy who meets the fox, "oh, yeah, I can help you." Just to exploit him. So, it's very important to find this independence. You're not rude, you're listening, but you know how to make your own decisions. This is really a great sign of progress on the path to awakening.

This is paired with another marker, if you will; it's that because the inner witness is reliable and trustworthy, you are not experiencing the ups and downs of uncertainty and comfort. You're in a pretty even mood of contentment. You absorb what comes, the ups and downs, make the best out of it, because you know where you go and how to do it and then you just do it. So there is a sense of contentment. A joyful mind. You're not over excited when good things come and super depressed when it doesn't happen the way you want it. You just surf with that, you dance with all of that, and then as we're instructed here and there in different teachings, you use this. You recycle, you upcycle, you transform it, it becomes a platform for further discernment and further creativity and benevolence and whatnot. So it's easy; you know your job and you do it. So that's another sign of progress, that you're on the right track and you're moving towards the right direction.

And this mind that is regularly content and satisfied with whatever comes, I would relate it to one of the slogans that we discussed a couple of weeks ago, which is, "don't turn gods into demons." Gods into demons means we have a very good opportunity; this human life. We receive the Dharma, we receive many instructions, we can think, we can cultivate this independence. Don't linger in this old habit like it's never enough, why they have this and why not me; you're woe-ing, you're crying,

because it's not what you wanted and so on. So instead of benefitting from the gods of the good situations and you know, here you would say, "counting your blessings," you keep a tally of your curses instead (most of them being homemade.) Home brewed misery. Just don't do that, it doesn't bring anything. Okay, maybe you hope you'll get some attention, "he's so sad. He's never happy. How can I help him?" Then every day you have to be, or appear, more and more miserable. So you'll get your daily dose of attention and cuddles. Move on. What is Sharona's mantra? "Get over yourself." Get over yourself, and then see what you have. You're alive, you have tremendous freedom, inside and outside; maybe not what you fantasized about, but what we have is already great. We can use this. And then we can find contentment in doing what we know has to be done using the tools that we have to work with what has to be done. That brings contentment. Otherwise you always linger on what is missing, what is not perfect, and you don't see the good that is already present.

So these are good indicators of progress and you should see that in your mind and in your character; do not minimize them, thinking, "yeah, it's okay, I'm okay, it could be better, no, see them and and appreciate them, and take refuge in them, with the sense of being able to stand on them, this becomes your ground. You know how to do it, you're happy to be doing it, it doesn't mean it's simple, it doesn't mean it's easy, but you know that you can turn this situation that might be sad or painful or whatever, into an awakening opportunity. And then when you do that you know it's fine, because whatever comes, how long it will take to be awakened, it doesn't matter, because you know what to do with it. So the ETA really doesn't matter. You don't need to care, because there is joy in the process. More confidence in the process. What more can you ask for?