

It Looks Different, But It's the Same.

Sally Brown

Most days I eat lunch and go out for a walk with my dog. I can walk to do most of my errands, so we do an errand or go to the Bark Park when there isn't one. Last spring we had news-worthy flooding and the far end of Bark Park was under moving water. Two years ago a major dam was removed upstream and hundreds of old logs came bobbing up from the bottom, left from the days when logging was done with horses and logs were floated down river to be processed. Some sank instead. So, with the flooding and the strength of the water, many logs, pieces of houses, old lumber, and detritus of many sorts came washing onto the shores of Bark Park.

It took a few months before we could go over to the submerged part of the island, but when we did it looked very different. There were log walls 10 to 20 feet high, new beaches of pure sand, rocks piled where there had been none, and leaves and twigs stuffed in crevasses high up in trees. I was stunned by the difference.

Yesterday Buddy (the dog) and I went down there to enjoy the warmth and sun, and I thought about how much was really the same. There were new paths, but then, there were paths before. There were piles of logs, but there had been piles there before. The vegetation was the same, if in a new place, and promises to be in full bloom this spring. Certainly the wildlife, including birds, was the same and busily adapting to the new surroundings.

A good natural lesson in all is different, and all is the same.

So as I sat on a log at the end of the island and watched the river flow, I started to think about a new group I have joined. It is the Lay Communications Working Group of the OBC. Their website is [Bright Moon.com](http://BrightMoon.com) and I will talk about it more at another time.

I am not the best group person, yet here I was in a group, but a group of committed Buddhists. Would Buddhist practice make a difference? I took a look.

Earlier in the week we had a meeting by a Skype arrangement. The attendees were from Oregon, Montana, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. There were no faces or video, just voices. It was easy to tell who was from the US! This was all new to me, but again, a meeting is nothing new, just a different format.

The meeting was long and I went through a number of helpful and not so helpful thoughts and generally took a back seat to the discussion (new for me, again.) But being who I am, I wrote down questions and would ask another member for answers at another time. I wanted and needed more information to become a responsible member of the group, and it is worth considering the timing when asking.

Part of what we talked about was how to take care of each other in the group – to allow space for joining or leaving if need be, what were good times for everyone to meet,

how to pass on good models of communication to others, how to conduct a meeting where no one could be seen! This was a pleasant surprise as I had not encountered this level of caring in a meeting setting before. I likened it to finding nice clean sand at the Bark Park. For those of us in the mountains, good sand is a rare treat!

So I began to think about how I, as Buddhist, would attend a meeting and came up with the following: meditating and focusing before the meeting starts, being prepared by being informed, being mindful of others, being open to differing opinions, listening attentively, commenting when it's helpful, and adding a big dose of Patience to the mix.

Finally, it is necessary to go to the meeting with an open heart and an open mind. Everyone in the Working Group is there with good intentions, and with that understanding we can all work together. I often forget this as many meetings I have attended seem adversarial in nature and as though they have been worked out before they begin by people in authority. Nice to have that be different! Like having a beautiful old log to sit on while watching the river – a good place to start a discussion.

None of this is new, but when it is done with intention, as part of training, for me it is very different – like having the logs of who I am rearranged. I look the same, but I can respond differently. I do think going to a virtual meeting with monks and lay sangha members will be a good experience for me, and I hope I can make some contributions for us all.

I will try and keep everyone informed as we go along, but since I am still 'in the woods' so to speak about what we are doing, I'll wait until next time.

In Gassho.