



A Few Words About Emptiness

by Zoketsu Norman Fischer

In Buddhist thought the concept “emptiness” refers to deconstructed reality. The more closely you look at something the more you see that it is not there in any substantial way, it couldn't be. In the end everything is just a designation: things have a kind of reality in their being named and conceptualized, but otherwise they actually aren't present. Not to understand that our designations are designations, that they do not refer to anything in particular, is to mistake emptiness.

When you look closely for anything and find that you can't find it, you do discover that although the thing itself seems to be void, there do seem to be connections. In fact connection is all you find, with no things that are connected. It's the very thoroughness of the connection - no gaps or lumps in it - only the constant nexus- that renders everything void. So everything is empty and connected, or empty because connected. Emptiness is connection.

So, do things exist? Yes and no. Yes, in that experience does occur, and no in that the experience that occurs is radically not what you think it is. The Heart Sutra in a famous passage says there are no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body and no mind. This doesn't mean that the sense organs and mind don't exist; it means they don't exist as we are deeply convinced they do: as separate real entities. We think we “have” eyes and ears. But eyes and ears as they exist deconstructed in emptiness can't be possessed. They are inherently dispossessed, even of themselves. Emptiness is freedom.

Why does any of this matter and what consequences does it have for living?

Three attitudes arise as a consequence of the appreciation of emptiness:

- flexibility - since nothing is real, fixed, separate, or able to be possessed what's the point of resistance?
- kindness - since everything is nothing but connection kindness is natural
- humility - who is going to feel like he's master of all this talk?