

The Solace of Surrender

Rob Preece Spring 2007 Tricycle Magazine

...As a psychotherapist, I am fascinated by those times when—through factors outside of our control, like illness, loss of work, or a change in circumstances—this entire edifice begins to crumble. At such times we enter a period of uncertainty about the form and direction of our lives. The ego begins to recognize that it doesn't have real control over what's happening. We feel lost, unsure of our ground, fearful of the unknown, and powerless. These times of liminality are like a bardo—an intermediate phase between states of being—and can lead to a kind of breakdown as familiar forms begin to dissolve and new forms have yet to emerge. It is tempting to grasp at something that will rapidly patch up the cracks and create a sense of security. We can experience these fearful times as periods of great danger, or we can see them as opportunities to change the orientation of our life. On our journey to freedom these are significant experiences, because they allow us to go beyond the ego's dominance....

This is an uncomfortable process, often accompanied by great resistance, fear, and even depression. We are required to let go and open to the unknown, and yet we still cling to what once felt secure. It can seem as though there are greater forces at work actively trying to change us. As Buddhists we may not find it easy to make sense of these apparent forces, since we do not ascribe such phenomena to God or other omnipotent agents....

...Buddhism asks us to relinquish the domination of the ego and its habits. We can do this by understanding the emptiness of self or ego. We can also understand this as the surrender of the ego to a deeper aspect of our nature that is transforming us....