

The Andy Karr quotes are taken from Chapters 1 and 5 of *Contemplating Reality*. The poem is taken from the anthology *A year with Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks.

### **ANDY KARR ON SUBTLE IMPERMANENCE**

As the Buddha said in the *Diamond Cutter Sutra*, all phenomena are “Like a star at dawn, like a bubble in a mountain stream, like a flash of lightning in a summer cloud, like a flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.”

A candle flame (a type of flickering lamp) is a good example of subtle momentary impermanence. What happens when we go into a restaurant or a shrine room and see candles burning? If we see a candle flame, look away, and later notice the flame again, we think that it is the same candle flame that we saw burning a few minutes before. In fact, it is not. The first instance of the candle flame is completely gone. Because the two images look so similar, we take them to be one thing. We make this mistake all the time when we see objects, faces, houses, rivers, or landscapes. We do not recognize subtle impermanence. Thought covers it over. (The candle itself is a good example of the impermanence of the continuum: the many instants of the candle seem to form one continuum that gets shorter and shorter as the candle burns away.)

### **CONTEMPLATION OF SUBTLE IMPERMANENCE 3**

Think about a candle flame – it is a process, in constant change.

At every moment, a new bit of wax is melting and turning into flame.

If you take a casual glance, the flame seems to be a single solid thing;

but if you look closely, you can see that the substance of the flame changes at every instant.

Does your mind in any way resemble a candle flame?

Is your mind a process, in constant change?

In almost every moment, does a new thought arise?

And does the new thought distract you, energize you, or annoy you?

And is that thought simply replaced by another thought in the next moment?

Is your mind a single solid thing, or does it change at almost every instant?

And if your mind is not a single solid thing, are you a single solid thing?

## A CANDLEFLAME POEM

As essence turns to ocean,  
the particles glisten.

Watch how in this candleflame instant  
blaze all the moments you have lived.

## ADVICE ON DHARMA STUDY FROM ANDY KARR

- Don't listen or study *like a politician*, clinging to your point of view or some party line. Who cares if you have studied great teachings in the past? What's the point of studying the dharma for self-confirmation? As the great Indian teacher Atisha said, "The best spiritual friend is one who attacks your hidden faults. The best instructions are the ones that hit those faults."
- Don't listen or study *like a movie critic*, evaluating the language and style of the teacher rather than listening to the substance of what he or she teaches. You might be able to amuse your friends with some sharp criticism later on, but in the end you will pay a price.
- Don't listen or study *like a consumer*, picking and choosing among teachings and teachers the way you would choose detergent in the supermarket. All of the Buddha's teachings present the truth and are worth studying and understanding. You might not know the value of a particular teaching at the time you hear it, but ten or twenty years from now, it might provide you with a critical piece of the puzzle.
- Don't listen or study *like an orphan*, feeling too pathetic to be able to understand what is being taught. The dharma is about *you*, not some obscure points in calculus, so if you keep working at it, you will definitely understand.
- Don't listen or study *like a "dharma groupie"*, so infatuated with the messenger that you never get the message.