

The Lamp On The Table With A Switch (No-Characteristics)

By Kevin A. Sensenig

Draft 1.03

2020 March 23 – 2020 March 25

You might say that the lamp on the table has a characteristic ‘a switch’, to turn it on or off. But this switch makes sense only for a being with fingers of an appropriate size. And it makes no sense for a fly or a socket wrench. So it is 1) neither being nor non-being; 2) dependent arising; 3) and no-characteristic.

This ‘makes sense’ or ‘makes no sense’ is a mental thing, or a functional thing. Do the lamp switch, the fingers, the fly, and the socket wrench realize this ‘makes sense’ or ‘makes no sense’ – and also do they realize this in their very present-moment awareness or potential or actual?

You might say that the lamp on the table has a certain bright light of a certain color – and that this is reflected in the room. But this light is not outside in the sunlight, and so shows brightly in the room. Outside it would not be able to illuminate anything. It would still have a white light – a certain color. Is this absolute, or is it related to our perception? Is its physical measure an absolute? It’s a certain frequency – is this relative, to other frequencies, and the unit of length? So this turns into a bit of a physics question. Is ‘white light’ related to the reference, ‘the total-color of the sun’? Is it related to the part of the spectrum ‘visible light’, and is that ‘visible’ related to our eyes, human eyes?

You might say that the table is hard and flat. Is this ‘the table presents’, or functional ‘it supports my book and a vase’, or responsive ‘it responds to my hand in this way, and my hand responds to it’? Is it positional, and is this a characteristic, or the fusion of the abstract and the concrete, relative, and dependent arising? For more discussion on this, see my paper “Comments On The Diamond Sutra Section 5”.

Non-discriminating. As we’ve seen, the lamp switch makes no sense for a fly, or a socket wrench. It is relative, dependent arising, neither being nor non-being, and no-characteristic. It is also non-discriminating. The switch does not discriminate the fly or the socket wrench: it simply presents itself as itself.

There is differentiation that occurs, however. In being non-discriminating, we see that the switch makes sense for the fingers (at a certain size), yet does not make sense for the fly or the socket wrench. It presents itself as it is, in this or that way – with the result (if we observe it) ‘makes sense’ or ‘makes no sense’ – without saying first, ‘this is a fly, a finger, or a socket wrench’ with some predetermined ‘bias’[1][2] as to what a fly, finger, or socket wrench is, or assigning it a hard-edged phenomenal distinction.[3] (These things would only be a false view, would get in the way, and lead to entanglements that would no longer allow for ‘presents itself’, ‘one arising space’, and ‘differentiation’. They lead to attachments to one side or another, omitting the very total presence and

actual of what is present.) It simply allows this or that to function – just as it is-and-unfolding. This is differentiation, which is just the catenation of the switch presenting itself as itself, in the same space as the fly or the fingers or the socket wrench presenting themselves, and the unity that is this very space – and is the non-discriminated space.

Recommended study: *The Diamond Sutra*. Zazen, and the everyday, may be key.

Not only does the observer matter in quantum physics, it matters in our macro world as well. This can be seen in mind, and the everyday.

Footnotes

1. I introduce this word ‘bias’. It has to be handled carefully. One must be careful to yield to accurate perception (Namgyel’s meaning for *prajna*), or the thing or situation ‘just as it is’. Here we let the fly manifest as the fly, and see this; we let the fingers manifest as the fingers, and see this; we let the socket wrench manifest as the socket wrench, and see this. (We might avert a catastrophe, in certain situations!) We often get into trouble, I think, with our pre-formulated opinions, and don’t let things, people, and objects – and their function – speak or project for themselves, and in context. ‘What is actually there.’ We miss the no-thing space. (We might instead be like the light switch: it doesn’t actively set out to prevent the fly or the socket wrench from even seeing it’s a light switch, to function as a light switch – it is ‘just-so’, and this might be similar to both the doing not-doing (*wei-wu-wei*) of Tao and silent way of Zen. The function or not is function-as-it-is. On the other hand, we might notice potential function, in this or that direction, and act accordingly. So, it’s the actual.) And seen in a non-discriminated way yields to sublime states and apperception; and these can lead to either action or quietude, yet transcend action and quietude. It is participant. Then there is the Zen meaning given to samadhi, by Shibayama, which is relevant to this expression, and to my own experience, yet is slightly a different meaning: the working of no-mind that transcends action and quietude; related, in an experiential way.

2. Sekida says, “Differentiation without equality is poor differentiation. Equality without differentiation is poor equality.”

3. The Buddha says in *The Lankavatara Sutra* that to see things in a discriminated way is to see them as individual, distinct. This then also gets tied to seeing things as an objectified, reified reality and attaching one’s view to this – where this is only a mirage. To see with non-discrimination is to awaken to realizing that what is seen is Mind itself.

Resources

The Diamond Sutra And The Sutra Of Hui-neng translated by A. F. Price and Wong Mou-lam.

The Lankavatara Sutra translated by D. T. Suzuki. (See this for significant content, and for non-discriminating mind.)

The Lamp On The Table With A Switch (No-Characteristics)

Page 2 of 3

The Logic Of Faith: A Buddhist Approach To Finding Certainty Beyond Belief And Doubt by Elizabeth Mattis Namgyel. (See this for *pratityasamutpada*, dependent arising.)
The Gateless Barrier: Zen Comments On The Mumonkan by Zenkei Shibayama.
Zen Training: Methods And Philosophy by Katsuki Sekida.
Zazen.
The everyday.
Just this world.

United States
2020