

Worlds of Our Own

We are often affected by others, by our work, and our environment, and our mental states, too, affects others, our work and our environment. Caught in the midst of our private realities and external situations, we regularly swing through the six realms. In our excruciating pains and mental torments, we fall into the lowest of the realms, the hells.

In our ignorance and fear, easily succumbing to the tricks and threats of others, we are caught in the predictability of the animal realm. Afflicted by insatiable cravings, whether through lack or despite plenty, we are chained to the shadowy preta realm (as ghosts). Our jealous struggles and violent ambitions turn us into ruthless asuras (or power-crazy demons), measuring others in terms of what profit or pleasure they can bring us.

Occasionally, during breaks and holidays, when we are able to get away from our work, from those we dislike, and from an oppressive environment, we momentarily taste a heavenly respite. Maybe it is a good meditation, or an invigorating Dharma study, or the pleasant presence of true-hearted friends. But it all passes on too soon. If we are skillful enough, we might just be able to remain on a human level, that is, until the samsaric cycle of the realms start all over again.

In a cyclic existence, it is difficult to evolve spiritually, to be our true selves. The rat-race turns each of us into a mere social unit, a “statistical individual,” that is, a member of a group, who in fact has no real existence apart from the group and who, therefore possesses no true individuality. As such a person, we often simply accept the standards, values, and realities of the group to which we belong.

A statistical individual, therefore, we usually have a low quality of consciousness. We are unaware of our true potential, as we are often emotionally dependent on others, which could be a guru figure, a parent figure, a powerful religious being, or the group. Even being “fashionable” can mean that we are caught in the rut of what others thing is right or best for us.

Sometimes, it appears to be such a heavy responsibility that we are tempted to try to hand it all over to someone else, maybe to a “God”, or some fashionable Oriental or Western guru-figure, or some power figure, in the hope that he or she will arrange everything for us with as little trouble as possible. We have handed over our remote control to others!

To get out of the rut, we must *want* to grow spiritually, and be *able* to do so. To be *able* to grow is to start with a truly self-affirming method of personal development. It starts with an unconditional self-acceptance: we have to start right where we are, and progress from there. We need to understand the personal nature of impermanence: we

can change for the better. We need to reflect on the characteristic of not-self: there is no one who has failed, no problem person—only difficult situations and problems.

We need to accept the problem situation before we can define it. We then need to look for its causes and conditions *within* ourselves, our patterns of behaviour, our reactivity to situations. We need to confront our unwholesome habitual behaviour. As we look deeper, we will see various ways out. We should choose the best path to free ourselves, even if this means going through trial and error.

In other words, we do not live by rice or bread alone, and surely not by blind faith. We are our senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind), how we make *sense* of things. We react with feeling towards them, but these feelings are often controlled by our past. As a result we never really live the present moment of the sense-experience but colour and distort them with our mental volitions: and so our consciousness reinforces itself.

However, even when the physical body is deprived of material food and dies, our mental body or existential consciousness¹ continues to be become what we think, and we are reborn according to how we use our sense-faculties. As we think, so we speak and act. As we think, speak and act, so we become, and will be, again and again,

Let us live as emotionally independent individuals, like clear mirrors unto ourselves, and unto others. Let us see ourselves in others, and let see their true good selves in us. Let us see our own inner goodness and rejoice. We are then capable of sharing happiness with others, that is, before we attain nirvana ourselves.

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¹ See *Viññāna* = SD 17.8a (6): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/17.8a-Khandha-5-Vinnana-piya.pdf>