

Truly beautiful mind

How do we live a truly quality life? We can easily and mindlessly get caught up with our routine life or work, and one day wonder, “What is it all about?” Yet, this is a break that we often let pass without looking through it as a window of opportunity to grow, to change, or even to realize some great potential within.

Such a self-doubt, ranging from a mild sense of boredom to a great sense of loss, is called *samvega* in the Buddhist texts. It means “a sense of urgency.” Historically, this is the emotion that prince Siddhattha experiences when he sees the old man, the sick man and the dead man, as the ancient story goes.

“What’s the big deal about being young, when we will grow old and decrepit anyway? What is the point of keeping healthy, when we will fall sick in body or mind eventually? What is the point of living, when we will surely die sooner or later?” These are philosophical questions: no wonder, we almost never meet any happy philosopher!

But these are more than philosophical questions: they are spiritual questions. They are at the core of our lives, which most of us either are unable or unwilling to face. Prince Siddhattha becomes Buddha because he goes all the way to find the answer to these 3-D’s (decay, disease and death) of life.

He has a hint of the answer in the fourth sight, that of the happy, pleasant looking holy man, someone, as it were, untouched by the 3-D’s of life. A profound vision opens up before him, one that is so powerful that he is willing to put everything else, including his family, aside to attain.

For, he realizes that he is not alone: all humans, all beings are afflicted. He goes forth to seek a lasting and complete solution to all these ills, and he finds it. In doing so, he has given up his biological family and embraces the whole human race as his spiritual family. Indeed, he embraces all living beings as his family, as evident from his countless acts of compassion.

The Buddha neither promises heaven for believers, nor consigns unbelievers to hell. Any informed Buddhist knows that the true heaven is our own minds of deep spiritual bliss, and hell is the payback of our own evil thoughts and acts. We create our own heaven and our private hell.

In fact, heaven cannot exist without hell, nor hell heaven: they are a duality, and bind those who live dual lives. The Buddha teaches us how to bridge this duality, by treating others as we would treat ourselves. There are really no “I” and “Thou,” only reflections of ourselves that we see in “others.”

In our social, political and religious insecurity, it is easy for us to try to draw dividing lines of tribal demarcations between “us” and “them.” But the Buddha teaches that there is really no “self.” There are no enemies: only friends we have not yet made. There are no unbelievers: only people who have not yet understood themselves. There are no sinners: only those who have yet to look deep within to see their godliness. In

short, spirituality starts with our unconditional love, of accepting ourselves just as we are, and accepting others just as they are -- as a start.

On a higher level, we need to examine how our body-based lives often stunt our mental lives. If we live simply dictated by what we see, what we smell, what we hear, what we taste, and what we touch, we are like moths drawn to an open flame. Like Prometheus, we die with pain, only to repeat the process daily and painfully.

But even Prometheus is eventually released from his rock of suffering, free from the eagle's daily tearing out his liver, only to become whole by dawn. We can release ourselves from the night of spiritual dismemberment by occasionally freeing ourselves from our physical faculties, momentarily letting go of all our physical sensing, and simply be truly one with ourselves. That is, by looking deep into our still and clear mind.

When we have fully freed ourselves from our physical selves, we are able to open the door of our breath and enter our inner space as mental beings of supreme bliss. Even if we are unable to enter that breath-door, just standing there and looking into it, can profoundly and lastingly energize us so that we return to the world of the senses as masters of our faculties. In short, we are a beautiful mind in a beautiful body.

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