

## I think I know

To say that knowing or knowledge is enough for salvation, even a happy life, is like hearing someone tell us that eating raw hot chili will cure our headache and we act on this information; or we read the label on a bottle that says “water,” but unknown to us, it is really kerosene, and we drink it anyway, with dangerous consequences. These are two simple examples of blind faith.

No matter how much faith or belief we put in the chili peppers or in our informant, it does not change the fact that our headache remains or even worsens. No matter how much faith we have in the label, in its beautiful clear print, kerosene is still not healthy, not even palatable, for us. If we persist in putting faith in the sad missaying, “believe that I may understand,” then we will sooner or later have to face its sad and painful consequences, and also harm many others along the way.

Knowledge is like a knife. The fact that we know that it *is* a knife is not enough. It might not be sharp enough to cut anything, or it breaks as soon as we use it. Even if we have a good knife (as far as knives go), we must know *how* to use it. Otherwise, we will not make very nice cuts of things, or worse, we will cut and hurt ourselves. When we know that this is a knife, and we know how to use it, and when not to use it, and how to keep it safely, then we have more than knowledge – we have wisdom.

In Buddhist training, knowledge begins with knowing ourselves, that we are nothing more than our six senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and thinking. We *have* eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, but they do not work in themselves. Here, it makes sense to say that we are not what we *have*, but we are what we *do*. We see things, and we try to make sense of them. Similarly, we try to make sense of what we hear, smell, taste, touch, and think. That is why, in an important way, they are called “the senses.”

Wisdom means firstly, understanding that nothing really happens with only one effect: whatever happens arises from many causes and effects. This is called conditionality. As such, it is meaningless to “blame” anyone or anything. Suffering arises as a result of conditions. Understand the conditions, we can lessen or even avoid or prevent the suffering. This is not always easy, but wisdom arises when we take our sufferings as lessons not yet learned.

From experience (or wisdom), we know that our senses are not always right. Often enough, we sense things the wrong way. More often than not, we make the wrong sense of things, and we do not even realize this for a long time. Worse than this is when we refuse to see things in any other way. This is called blind faith.

Blind faith, in the extreme, is like driving a car at high speed on a dark highway, unable to see the road, but thinking that we would reach our destination. If we are foolish enough to do so, we would certainly never reach home. We might even harm or kill someone else. Blind faith, no matter how fervent, as such, can be highly dangerous.

If we speak of blind faith, then we can also speak of “wise faith.” In simple terms, blind faith is “I believe that I may understand,” while wise faith is “Let me understand that I may believe.” The difference is very clear and it is vital to know this. In

the former case, I simply accept *as true and real* what I experience (from what I sense) or what I hear as true and real.

Here, we need to examine the two key words: “real” and “true.” Without going into philosophical details, we can say that something is real if we have sensed or experienced it for ourselves. An easy example is when we touch a blazing fire, we would *really* burn ourselves. A more tricky example is that of seeing a mirage; we *do* see an oasis in the hot desert air: the image is real because we can see it. But it is not true. Or, we might say, it is *virtual* reality.

Indeed, much, if not most, of our thinking and views are projections of virtual reality. We often experience things and view others the way we have been conditioned to do so. We rarely see the present, but we clothe it virtually in our past. As such, our lives seem to be little more than a tragic comedy on the stage of our past.

If we see our lives as a warehouse of uncompleted projects, we exist merely looking for stops to fill those gaps. External stops can never fill internal gaps. They are worlds apart, and there are no God of the gaps. We need to welcome ourselves into our own world, merge into our inner space and set things right.

Even the first blush of our efforts in touching our inner space is liberating. For a moment, we could see eternity. We only lose this vision when our heart is drawn back in the world’s noise by an outside thought. The world is the most insidious of evangelists, incessantly trying to gorgonize us into its own image. The best way to treat any evangelist is to look the other way.

If we only love God, we can never truly love mankind, or any living being, for that matter. Man has named God, but he is not a person, much less a thing. Perhaps, we could think of God as spirit. In other words, there is *no* God, only godliness.

We cannot experience God, just as we cannot experience John or Ah Beng. The Buddha teaches us godliness here and now. We can feel godliness by cultivating unconditional love, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. Unconditional love begins with our accepting ourselves just as we are, and to do the same for others. Compassion is to be kind to others even when they do not deserve it. Appreciative joy is being happy at the happiness of others. Equanimity is the still mind that reflects the world just as it is: it is the peace of having sown the seeds and letting the plant grow and flower.

The purpose of life, then, is not merely to know. For, knowledge is not the end, but only the means for full living. When knowledge is *valued for itself*, it becomes blind faith, a view, a fetter preventing growth and freedom. When we begin to understand *how we know*, then we see only mental constructs. We can only transcend knowing when we have learned to truly feel, that is, touch the spacious stillness within.

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