

## Stop, thinking! Welcome, feeling!

Like other religions and systems, Buddhism often begins with words, but where the others refine the words, making them louder, more omnipresent, a true Buddhist gently moves ever more towards a spacious silence. Although words are the best we have for communicating with one another, it is not the best medium for the liberating truth that the Buddha has discovered and taught.

We have a way with words, and words have their way with us. The moment we put an idea into words, we limit it in a certain way. That is, unless we allow ourselves to hold on to those ideas only so long as they work, that is to say, they bring us a wholesome fullness and spacious joy.

If we care for a moment to look deep into our hearts, we might notice that we are but a serial letter-go of ideas and opinions. We are not even able to remember, much less record, how many ideas have arisen in our minds, or how many opinions we have hatched in our lives, even opinions about our own selves. Yet we claim them to be “I,” “me,” “mine,” as if we are unchanging and unmoving entities.

The point is that ideas and opinions simply come and go, like our breath. We do not really have much control over them. In fact, in a sense, we have more control over our breath. We could hold our breath, if it helps, or slow it down to a gentle sweet flow. The true heroes of real life are those who are at peace with their breaths.

We can try to helpfully think about the breath. It is the most precious thing we have: it is our very life. No breath, no life. It is also a good indicator of our emotional state: the heavier we breathe, the faster we burn ourselves out, as it were. Notice how fast we breathe when we are angry or do something bad.

Feel how peaceful our breath is when we pray, especially without words, or when we meditate in stillness. We can then really *feel* our breath: we *are* our breath. To understand the breath is to understand life itself, to know ourselves. This is the Buddha’s open secret, but we need to be *open* to make it no more secret. It is our thinking that locks it away as a secret.

We *think we know*: two most potent ingredients for life imprisonment. While thinking limits ideas, turning them into perishable goods, knowing makes mummies of living truth and beauty. To *think* too much is to allow words to get in the way of our best interests. It is the dead weight that prevents our hot-air balloon from rising into the open heights. To *know* too much strips us naked of all veneer of comfortable tales and correct lies that fill and fuel our lives.

Yet thinking and knowing can serve us well if we really *feel*. For, to feel is to fully taste life’s offerings for ourselves. We need to truly feel what pain is to value happiness. Yet true happiness is not merely the absence of pain, but an understanding that the two go together.

We need to truly know loss so that we value gain and love. Yet true happiness is not merely a catalogue of what we have and what we do, but the wisdom that gain and loss are inseparable.

We need to truly suffer blame to really enjoy praise. Yet true happiness is not a daily dose of dumb praises. For, a true appreciation of another must come as a surprise,

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not an expectation. It is like a cloudy day, when a bright ray of sun welcomingly breaks through. Yet true happiness embraces both praise and blame, from which we have a lot to benefit.

We need to walk humbly with obscurity before we realize that fame is a crowd that swallows us up, a sea of faces waving at us. Yet true happiness is unmoved by empty obscurity nor by crowded fame.

Happiness and sorrow, gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and no fame, love and hate – they are all voices in our heads. They are voices from our eyes, our ears, our noses, our tongues, our bodies, and most for all, our minds. Voices, voices everywhere, no sound maker is there! Keep it so, and we are safe.

Stop, thinking! Welcome, feeling! When we see someone, we are *that*; not the words we wrap him with. When we hear someone, we are *that*; not our inner chatter that jars him up. When we think of someone, we are *that*: smile, we are making it all up, a joke we play on ourselves.

See how the lotus rises from the mud that roots it. True strength rises out of the fire and ashes of pains and losses. See how the rain runs off a lotus leaf. And how the lotus blooms at the sun's first kiss.

Let us walk in love, kindness, gladness and inner calm: this way is safer.

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