

Belief limits, wisdom frees

WE CAN HELP OURSELVES. Vesak or Buddha Day reminds us that we can all awaken and free ourselves from suffering in this life itself. This means that we can understand enough about ourselves to let go of selfishness and self-centred views. While science can provide us with amazing information and human comfort, we need not always rely on it for true happiness. Furthermore, we can be truly free from even religion itself and fully awaken to liberation.

In other words, we have the power for self-healing and self-salvation if we choose to, or we could be blinded or blinkered by the pessimistic teachings of those who say we are sinners and cannot help ourselves. I'm reminded of Buddha-like doctors who gently tell their patients who have sleeping or stress problems that they do not need any *medication*: they need meditation!

KNOWLEDGE IS PROVISIONAL. We live in an information age and can find out anything we want at our finger-tips on some digital device. Despite the abundance and availability of information, we still lack wisdom. We spend more time talking into digital devices than communicating with real people. We heap up knowledge digitally, but almost never look within for self-knowledge. We lose ourselves in virtual reality of electronic games and busyness, but have almost no idea of what true reality is.

Yet all such devices, knowledge and realities, helpful as they may be, are impermanent and unsatisfactory. We still have doubts about our real purpose in life and true happiness. We will never find any real meaning or true purpose in life by looking for them in the world out there. Even the amazing digital discoveries and inventions can provide us with only information. We need to make sense of all this so that we have wisdom, liberating knowledge.

Science helps us to better understand the world outside without any need for religious beliefs, even forcing religion to revise themselves. Now science is able to probe our brains and minds to help us understand ourselves better. Yet, science only knows more and more of less and less, and there seems to be no end to this. The theoretical scientists know very well that the prevalence of doubt and speculation are vital for their relevance and employment.

One vital truth that science is helping us to better understanding than ever before is that impermanence is universal. Yet, the Buddha has given detailed teachings on this long before the dawn of science. It is helping us better understand this. Science may better our lives and inform us in amazing ways, but only wisdom will give us real meaning and true freedom.

WHAT WE HAVE ARE IMPERMANENT. If we care to look deeper into the kinds of friends and religious people that we know, we might notice that there are two kinds of them. There are those who befriend us for what we "have," and those who befriend us for what we "are." There are those who befriend us for our looks, status, wealth, or power. These external things are like flames that attract moths and insects. This flame also destroys them when they fly too near it.

If we live in a crowded competitive urban setting, we easily fall into the delusion that we are what we *have*. In that case, if we lose what we *have*, then what *are* we? We are nothing; we find ourselves with neither friends nor refuge. Perhaps, we might then realize that those "friends" are false. To that extent we have wisdom.

If we realize that we can rise again through our own efforts, then our wisdom has grown. We might go on to see that nothing is better than a calm and clear mind. This helps us to

see that even if we are happy with what little we have, it is a meaningful happiness; we can truly enjoy what we have. We do not need much to do this. Vesak is a reminder that small and simple can be beautiful.

Our calm and clear mind allows us to enjoy even the little that we have. This is called contentment. It allows us to be happy in the present moment, no matter what. This is true happiness. To be truly happy does not mean we have no problems at all. It means that nothing out there can really trouble us, as long as we leave these problems where they are, solving them right there, and not letting them drown our lives.

We may “have” problems: what we *have* are not really ours. Omit the “we” (or “I”), then only “problem” remains. We “are” happy: what we *are*, that’s really us.

When we start thinking we “are” the problem, then we will not be able to solve it. We have disempowered ourselves. So we start looking for answers outside of ourselves. This is called superstition. This is when we turn to religion, magic, fengshui, and what have you. These may solve problems, but they do not free us from the roots of the problems (which are within us).

Just for a moment, think about those people who claim to make our luck better. What about their own luck? If they were really able to bring us good luck, why don’t they enjoy good luck themselves? If they can’t, then surely they are out of luck. How can the unlucky help us? The point is that they are really helping themselves to our being superstitious and helpless.

Even if the products of these peddlers of “luck” do “work,” it often has nothing to do with moral goodness. It does not matter whether we are good or bad. In fact, we can be bad or evil, and still enjoy such luck. What kind of luck is that? It comes with very painful karmic costs. It’s simple really: if we believe in luck, we can never be truly secure. We are depending on something outside of ourselves.

TRUE REALITY IS THE MOMENT. When we look within, we see thoughts and feelings. Whether we now it or not, as a rule, we think that we have a “fixed self.” We might say, “I am what I am,” but the reality is “I am what I *was*.” Much of what we think we are is formed by how we were brought up, by how our peers and the media influence us, and by comparing ourselves with others.

The point is that all these conditionings and comparings are actually our living in the past. That is why we had so much difficulty trying to catch up. And when we thought we had caught up, it’s not really what we thought it was: it’s all in the past tense!

We need a life, or rather, we need to *live*, and to live *now*. Right here, what do we really need to do first: get that done. What do we need to do next: get that done next. When walking, if we were to constantly look back, or to look too far ahead too often, we would surely fall. Most of the time, we need to look right where we are, and be there. Right here we are, reading this, at peace with ourselves: this is it. Start here.

Happy Vesak: a Buddhaful Day and a life of clear vision!

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