

## **Let the moment seize us**

After adolescence, or even in the heat of it, many of us would wonder what we want to do with our lives. We already have a job or living comfortably in some way, but somehow we feel we could be doing something bigger than ourselves, or at least something big we are meant to do. Maybe the word “big” is not the right one.

Anyway, it seems to be big, but it is ever elusive. Perhaps, we know someone or read about someone who has been so successful that many would want to emulate him, or be jealous of him. But we feel as if that that niche has become trite. We want to do something really different, something that is really us, really “me.” It’s like a mirror trying to look at itself.

Anyway, many of us (mostly young graduates) think that the answer lies in making a huge amount of money. Then, we can buy almost anything we need or want. We could live just the way we want. We begin by looking for money, but it is just a matter of time, we find money looking for us. Perhaps we have found the right job, and earning more money than we could spend.

But after a while, we find that just buying things, or even buying people (we tend to attract certain kinds of friends who instinctively sniff our status, and hang out with us by such smell and taste). We have all the things we need or want, but there’s still something missing, something really big (again not the right word) – because it seems to be subtle, something bigger than us.

Here’s an inspiring story based on true events. A friend from my home town – let’s call him William – the most intelligent from a large but very poor family, decided (after secondary school, in his late teens) to go on a world trek despite not having any money. He was good-looking, so he easily made friends. He was a great conversationalist, so he easily moved people. He was courageous, so he basically could do what he planned to do.

So William trekked up north through peninsular Malaysia, through Thailand, Myanmar, across India, overland through Iran and the Middle East, reached Europe, and found himself in Italy. Along the way, he did odd jobs, often dish-washing in restaurants. He was a devout Buddhist and religious person, so he easily found accommodation in Buddhist temples, with Buddhist families, or some friends he easily made along the way.

Although William did not make it to college, as I had said, he was very intelligent, a quick learner. So he started work as a dish-washer in a restaurant in Italy, and easily picked up Italian. In time, he worked his way to be the cook’s assistant, and learned Italian cuisine.

To cut the long story short, he saved enough money to be able to fly to Australia, and there continued to work in a restaurant. Before long, having mastered enough of Italian cuisine, he was able to start his own small Italian food business. By now, he is happily settled and married, with a family, and basking in the evening of his life.

William’s story is not about someone who seized the moment. When he left home, he wasn’t even sure of what he wanted to do. Perhaps, just see the world, meet people, and learn things. In an important way, he had faith in himself, but had no aim in life the way most of us would after we have finished college.

The secret of his success was not that he seized the moment, but rather that he allowed the moment to seize him. It was as if, he simply threw himself at the world, and let the world decide what to do with him. He had full faith in the world, and it’s the only world he knew. He knew he had a place in the world, but he let the place seek him. He simply made himself available.

So it is with Buddhist training, especially with mental cultivation. We can never force our meditation; it just happens. However, it can only happen when we make ourselves available to what is right before us, that is, the present moment.

To keep ourselves available in the present moment, we use our breath, which is the best present-moment marker we have. “Staying” in the present moment is just a figure of speech. There is no way we can remain stuck to something that is moving, changing, become other every moment – that’s the present moment.

We may think that “nothing” is happening, but it is happening, even if we do not see it at first. Just be there, like William the world trekker. Wherever he went, there he was, doing whatever needed to be done. He had no savings, no plans, no dreams, simply living day to day. But he was responsive to the moment and the opportunity that it provided. This was how he lived the moment.

We may have everything in the world, great plans, greater dreams, but if we are unavailable to the moment, we have nothing, we are nothing. A good start is simply to realize this: that we are nothing. Then we have made our first effort in being available to the moment.

As we move through life, day after day, doing things alone, or with others, or to others, we can either force ourselves on others or on those things we are working with. If we force ourselves on them, we will only see that force we have projected onto others. We see what we want to see, we only get what we deserve, nothing more.

But when we make ourselves available to them, things really begin to happen. Take the case of a fixture or appliance in our home that’s not working well. Our first impulse is to knock it, or kick it – we force ourselves upon it. It may work by fluke, but as a rule, it doesn’t.

However, if we take a few calm moments just to examine carefully how it is assembled, or how to properly open it up, and see what possibly is wrong with it, often enough it only needs a simple adjustment (like tightening a loose screw, or firmly pushing in a loose plug), changing a small part (like replacing a washer), or some repairs we can do ourselves.

So, too, with our meditation. At the end of each meditation, we review our practice. First, we remember the good parts (these help us to better our future meditations), or we examine where we went wrong, and discover and avoid the conditions that worked against us. Then, we simply sit for a silent moment to let it all sink in. We can use this same approach in our work and conduct, too. It’s a great way to know ourselves better, and to better ourselves.

From the moment we wake up, we have a choice: we can think of all the bad stuffs that had happened, or of the great happy memories that are always there. When we are with people, the best of them or the worst of them – we have a choice to force ourselves on them, or be present and learn about them. Remember our home fixtures and appliances? How we deal with them often reflects how we deal with people, too.

If we are available to the moment, we will open ourselves to surprises. People may have their quirks: we often hate them; actually, we hate the possibility of them. But if we do this, then we have missed the opportunity of really knowing them and making friends, or deepening our friendship. We might even weaken or lose a friendship, when we try to jump the moment.

When we put ourselves fully into the moment, we also lose our self. We discover a bigger self, that others have so much more in common with us than we think. Our differences then make our similarities even more surprising and precious. We think that we must always be on top of things and others, but all we need is really just a bit of versatility: just let the moment seize us, and see what happens. *Da capo*.

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