

The inward journey

Life is a journey; Buddhism, the path; Dharma, the goal.

Buddhist teachings are but steps up the spiritual ladder to awakening. We must step on each rung carefully and firmly, and move the other foot up to the next rung. We put that foot down firmly, and then lift up the other one, and so on. Some of the rungs look the same, but there is a gentle upward movement, if we do not stop.

Occasionally, it is refreshing just to enjoy the view around us, but we should not be deceived. We are still on the ladder. So, any earth tremor or strong gust of wind might knock us down, and we have to start all over again – that is, if we are not hurt and can find the ladder.

Perhaps, we can enrich this parable by imagining that there are level spaces at intervals up the cliff of ignorance. At some point, we reach this level space. There might be a path leading us to some delightful and distracting places on that level. But we need to look for the next ladder, and move upwards again, before we are assailed by ferocious beasts or hurt by poisonous plants on that level.

This is, in fact, a version of the myth of the inward journey. "Myth" here means a mentally or spiritually symbolic way of looking at things that challenge us, that we need to face and rise out of them.

Whenever we need to take a rest on this inward journey, let us reflect as follows:

The present is but a moment. Try to touch it, it's gone. It's best to just smile at it, and move on – and just let it move on.

The longest journey starts with a single step. It's all right to move slowly, but we must keep on moving. Or, even take a step back to see a beautiful view, or to catch our breath. But, never linger too long. Then we may forget the journey.

Like insects in a dark night, a crowd is drawn to the light, blinded by it. The wise let the light show the right way. When the crowd goes the wrong way (it usually does), it is better for us to walk alone the other way.

We do not create our future. The habits we now cultivate will.

Sow a thought, grow an act, then nurture a habit and harvest the destiny, bitter or sweet.

If happiness is found outside of ourselves, everyone would be happy. Only when we look within, can we see what we really are, and then know what we really want, or rather, need.

The happiest people don't have everything. They happily make the best of what they have and what they are. They know the difference to have and to be. We can have all the money we desire, but even without that, with wisdom, we can be truly happy.

When, in our journey, we reach a high spot, we look back in peace and see the winding difficult path we have taken. With every step, we have left that path behind. If we look within, then we see that as we grow we have been shedding the shells of our views and opinions. All that we think and feel just keep changing, like the landscape and weather around us. We cannot hold our breath too long.

A thought is harmless until we believe it. To believe it is to try to hold it, and not let it go. This thought is the mind's breath. Just as we must breathe out what we breathe in, we have to let that thought go, no matter how long we try to hold it. It is not the thought, but our attachment to it, that brings suffering. When we breathe the thought out, we grow a little wiser.

There is no life without the breath of change. It is the path our life must take for us to grow. Whatever lives must change to grow. Change gives meaning to everything. Change *is* meaning. Then, we have a mind that can see itself.

When we are foolish, we can be full of confidence; when we are wise, we can be full of doubts. It's better to be wise and work with our doubts. The wise then question the doubts. We need to ask the right question: this is the key that frees the answer.

Everything exists in time. Time is change. Nothing can exist forever. Happiness is when we flow with these changes, and understand what is going on. Then, we see our mind growing, our heart radiant. As we age with wisdom, the body may disobey us more and more, but our mind obeys us more and more.

We recall how when we were born, we cried, while others around us looked at us and smiled. Now is our turn to close this book and open a new one. We leave this life in peace and smile, while those around us cry. But the wise cry not: they joyfully bid us farewell (never goodbye). For, we shall meet again.

Our future self is watching us through our memories – just as we are now looking at our past. So what would the future think of what we *are* now, and what we are *doing* now?

R434 Simple Joys 290
Piya Tan ©2016