

Toying with views

Everyone has views, everyone loves views, everyone is a view. Notice the "LOVE," the "HAS [have]" and the "IS": they refer to our nature to want, to have and to be. Technically, in the suttas, we have these existential equations:

"to have" = sensual desire (kāma-c, chanda), the 1st mental hindrance;

"to be" = eternalism (sassata, diṭṭhi), the first kind of extreme view, and

"not to be" = annihilationism (uccheda, diṭṭhi), the second kind of extreme view.

They are said to be "extreme" because they make us assume that things are simply "black and white," you are with me or against me – a duality, with nothing in between. If we are caught in this kind of mindset, then, we do not have much choice in life.

This duality problem, interestingly, is highlighted in Shakespeare's greatest tragedy, Hamlet (1603), where the hero reflects, "To be or not to be? That is the question." Hamlet is contemplating suicide. He compares death to a "little sleep," which he thinks wouldn't be so bad. But then, the only catch is that he might still dream when dead – bad dreams. Then, he wonders if it is better to act or do nothing at all. Is life worth the pain?

With only two choices, Hamlet is in a terrible fix – this is suffering for him. Buddhists would have suggested a third choice: to love. Showing lovingkindness would bring us safely above and beyond these dichotomies. But then, we have philosophy and religion, and not literature and drama.

This is where literature is a valuable way of learning – when our choices in life are limited. Literature presents "what if?" or "as if" situations so that we do not have to actually make the mistakes to learn that they are mistakes. We have many "what if?" and "as if" situations in Buddhist teachings, especially the stories and mythology.

The Jātaka stories, for example, present to us situations where we can learn without having to make the troubling mistakes or going through a lot of suffering. The teachings of the 5 realms (humans, gods, animals, pretas and hell beings) or 6 realms, if we add the asuras as a realm, remind us that we can fall into these states at any time in our lives – not just after death.

If we habitually think violence (of harming others), we become hell-beings, even here and now. If we measure people and things, and try to collect them, we do not really enjoy them – then we are pretas. If we dislike learning (especially studying the suttas) or cultivating ourselves to be better and happier, but revel in ignorance and superstition, then we are animals. If we exploit others merely for our benefit, then we are asuras.

As good humans, we think and feel, and are capable of loving, learning and evolving. When we are joyfully at peace with ourselves, we are devas, gods or angels – but these are impermanent states, and we will fall away from them in life's Snakes and Ladders game.

At the bottom of all these cycles of lives is our views. Our views make us what we are and will be. As we think, so we are, so we become. The wisdom is to take charge of our mind and manage our views, so that they do not create and control us.

By the way, there are those who claim that they have "no views." In **the Dīgha,nakha Sutta** (M 74), the Buddha declares that this is also a view!¹ If we insist that we are right, and others are all wrong, then we make a greater error: claiming to be awakened when we are not.

If we are not yet awakened, then this formula of self-training based on **Dhammapada verse 183** helps:

Avoid all bad = give up wrong views;

Cultivate the good = work on right view (note the singular);

Purify the mind = giving up all views (momentary for the unawakened but on-going for those on the path of awakening, like the streamwinners).

As long as we are not on the path of awakening — not at least streamwinners — we will have wrong views. These views will control us and transform us into asuras (power complex), hell-beings (violent thoughts), pretas (addictive and ritualistic conduct), or animals (ignorance). It is not easy to remain human, much less so to remain as divine beings.

If we allow the Dharma into our lives, then, for that moment, we are Dharma children. Even as children, we sometimes pretend to be adults. If we laugh at this, then we are fine. If we take this child's play seriously, then we have problems.

Our toys are our views. Like children we are proud of our toys — because they are "ours," not because they are "toys," so it seems. We show them and share them with others. It's good to share, good to accept some toys from others, too.

Yet, we need to grow, and look for better toys. Soon, we learn how toys are made and why we enjoy playing with toys. In due course, we don't need toys any more — we are just HAPPY, like being with our loved ones, or joyfully loving others, and telling them about toys.

How do I know all this? I still play with toys, quite a collection, I love showing and sharing them, I'm also curious about the toys of others.

Yet, there are moments when toys don't matter: such is the moment when I realize "I" is the trickiest toy of all. The I is the ultimate self-limiting walls we build around an otherwise open space. A few chinks in the walls allow us to see what's outside: these are our views -- our peeps through chinks in the self-limiting walls called self.

In a moment like this, we may just see those walls. When we gaze at them — when we see them for what they really are — they begin to crumble. If we look on with a love to know ourselves, we begin to see a window, maybe more (that give us bigger views of things), or better, we see a door through the wall. We can then go through this door and get outside of our walled self; we can forget ourselves for a while. That's when the real fun begins. Then, we want to get out more often. We should.

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¹ See Dīghanakha Sutta (M 74,2), [SD 16.1](#).