

The way we are, we are the way

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Telling others what's right and good, what's wrong and bad, is not always easy—people may hate us for various reasons, but in the long run (it is very long), they are always grateful. It's also the only way to go for a living Buddhist. Silence is not an option, unless it is unhelpful and untimely to speak.

When we have to be silent, it must be like the Buddha's silence, when it is not the right time or right thing to speak about. Otherwise, silence is no option. How can we be silent when we see someone walking in the dimness heading for certain danger. We can and must call out, even shout out, warning him to be mindful.

We must, of course, work to help ourself first. We must recognize when the **animal** arises in us, inducing us to feel trapped and fearful, not wanting to learn or to change when we can. We should turn to the Buddha's wisdom worded in the suttas and sounded by wise teachers who have tasted the Dhamma with joy and clarity.

We must recognize the **asura** when it unrelentingly grips us to measure others, exploit them, use them as mere tools for our greater wealth, power and pleasure. We have to turn to the Dharma of letting go of self-centredness, to see others as we see ourself. Others, too, love life, happiness, freedom, truth and wisdom. We must work with them, learn from them, share with them—this is what true friendship in Dhamma is about.

We must recognize the **preta** that we are, when we end up collecting wealth, power, pleasure, even knowledge, but never really enjoying any of them. We have no real time for people who love and care for us, and those we should love and care about, young and old. We must heal ourself with the nourishing meal of kindness and breathe unconditional love. We start by accepting ourself just as we are; then, we can see how we can move closer to the safety and joy of the path of awakening.

We must recognize the **hell-being** we have become: destructive, violent, angry, unforgiving, causing pain to others. Hell is not a place we go to; hell is this anger, hatred and violence we hold inside us, which can overwhelm us. It is always there lurking like a violent virus ready to flood our system and smite us with pain, illness and madness. At first, we may even see our violence as power over others, but when we hold fire, it burns us, too.

When we seem blessed with wealth, status, influence, holiness, we may imagine them as blessings of karma or even gifts from God or the gods themselves. Even as Buddhists, we may still be covertly attracted to the notion of God, even worship Him, since it is a symbol pure power, and we are drawn to the powerful. But the **heavens** are floored with trapdoors to hell. The frivolous gods are unhappy to know of their impending end, and invariably fall into their waiting hells when their good karma run out.

As **humans**, we suffer both pleasure and pain, good and bad, but we also have greater freedom to choose with which to fill our lives. We are also able to think to profound depths and to feel to incredible heights. We know, or at least can sense, what is ugly and what is

false. We naturally love beauty and truth, and are able to see how they are intimately linked.

Above all, the buddhas arise from the humans, and we are in the best position to follow the Buddha's path of awakening from the nightmares of the subhuman planes and the sleep of the gods. To awaken is to break free from all these conditioned states for the death-free unconditioned nirvana.

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