

Measure for measure

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Recently I had a short but profoundly interesting discussion with an ex-student of mine, now a successful professional and family man, of what we generally know as “the measure of man.” He was responding to my remark that in our urbanized modern society, we are all somehow tagged with a price and accordingly treated like goods.

He adds that what I have said has been happening since the dawn of human civilization. We have been measured by the powers that be, for the sake of more efficient decision-making in terms of our roles in society. Even the most advanced education system today is designed to compartmentalized people into different “bins.” Our professional worth, indeed, our human worth, is significantly measured at this formative time.

Price tag

The reality is that this measurement and price have been tagged upon us from the time of our birth. Our lives have been, to a significant extent, defined by our parents, who are, in turn, dictated by social norms, regarding how we should be raised and what roles we are to play. Our worth is measured, and we are taught to measure the worth of almost every aspect of our life and of others.

This measuring is even more pronounced when we live in a modern urban environment. As already mentioned, even as we are schooled, we are graded and our schooling performance defines what job we can get, how much we will earn, what kind of person we can marry, what kind of life we will have, and so on.

Society, even our religion, would measure our worth, and we are salaried or rewarded accordingly. We are accorded respect and wealth, and allowed power and pleasure according to these measures: call them class, profession, status, title, etc.

Measure takes, love frees

Yet, it is what cannot be measured in man that makes him divine. We may say that this is Love. Not just love, but the Art of loving. We can only take measures, but love only **is** when it is given.

Science measures; Art liberates. In our best moments, we endeavor to celebrate that which liberates. Take, for example, Shakespeare’s **Sonnet 18**:

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,

By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.¹

Man may come, man may go, but love and joy go on forever. For, beauty is when words are free beyond measure, when we can only **feel**, fully experience, the immeasurable.

Awakening

Even those who have renounced the world for the religious life are measured by how much holiness they **have** or are seen to have, compared to other renunciants in terms of looks, voice, holiness and teachings given by them.²

"Looks" would include race and skin colour. "Voice" includes our opportunity to listen to them. "Holiness" is defined by the stories we hear from others about them that legitimizes them with charisma. "Teaching" includes the stories that they tell us, claiming to greatness and holiness for themselves.

True renunciation only begins when we notice such measures; when we understand **why** they occur; then, we reject such measures with **revulsion** (*nibbidā*). Only then, we are really free from the world: we become **immeasurable** in our love, compassion, joy and peace. This is how revulsion, having nothing to do with "it," leads to the path of awakening.³

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¹ See **Rūpa Sutta** (A 4.65); Puggala Sutta (Pug 4,22): SD 3.14 (7).

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonnet_18#cite_note-1.

³ **Nibbidā**, SD 20.1.