

The Dhamma speaks to us

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Ajahn Chah, in “A still forest pool” (2002, 2003)¹, tells a story about how when he sat very still near a forest pool, strange and beautiful animals would appear at the pool’s edge, and the longer he sat in absolute stillness, the stranger and more beautiful forest beings would appear. But, at the slightest movement, however, these fabulous beings would simply disappear.

He is pointing to something even truer, more beautiful, more liberating than exotic forest animals. Our mind can be best experienced when we are at peace and happy. This needs practice, of course. Yet, really, it is “non-practice,” in the sense of letting go of what prevents that beautiful and freeing truth from uplifting us above our self-created world so that we enjoy the heights of true reality and freedom: we get the bigger picture.

Sense-based

This is the practice of **inner renouncing**, true giving up. This does not mean that we have no views: simply, we do not grasp them. We let them come, we let them go. In this way, our mind grows beyond our knowledge. What we know all comes from our **senses**: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling (through touch) and thinking.

The last—**thinking**—is especially tricky, as we do not really see things as they are. Rather, whatever, we see, hear, smell, taste, touch and think, we at once relate to what we **had** seen, had heard, had smelt, had tasted, had touched and had thought before. We are certain of this because they **had** happened.

This is—or, more correctly, **was**—our views: what we **were**. We are familiar with this, and we cling to this familiarity, like to Mommy when we were children, or to some Authority figure when we are adults, or to some Guru figure or to some God-figure now. Then, we work to impose these beliefs upon others. This is **power**; it can be intoxicating.

Something hinders

However, even without keeping our mind habitually peaceful and joyful; even when we are caught up with the pleasures of our senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling and thinking—we still notice **something** of what we really are. This “something” means aspects of true reality: impermanence, suffering, non-self. However, since we are more attracted to what we **like**, and reject what we dislike, and ignore what we have no feeling for, we actually only experience that Something: only about a third of what is really happening.

This is our **knowledge**, an incomplete experience. Our knowledge is primarily made up of only what we **like** to sense. In the way, our knowledge limits us. A well-qualified professional, for example, may think that he is titled, qualified, experienced, rich, busy and respected by others so that he is **entitled** to know Buddhism, that he already knows it. This is further

¹ On the story of the “still forest pool,” see: Nimitta: SD 19.7 (4.6.3.2; 4.7.1).

encouraged by famous Gurus and Authority Figures who easily and excitedly accept and endorse him because of professional entitlement.

Entitled

The Entitled Professional feels the hot air of the Guru's charisma, fame, et cetera, filling him up. He feels big; he hears the Guru's voice. In fact, he hears little else, since he has totally invested (which also means "dressed" himself) in the Guru. We can never be better than the Guru. The Guru is one who always ensures that he is on top of us (even literally) so that we always adore and need him.

Indeed, without our adoration and fanning, there is No Guru. But we do not know this. We are limited by our knowledge—only a **third** of our real experience, remember? We can never be better than our Guru. If we can then we do not need the Guru! This is called self-reliance, self-understanding, which leads to self-liberation: spiritual independence (which Buddhism is really about).

The darkness within

As an entitled Buddhist, we only hear our own voice, or worse, we hear only the Guru's voice. Since this is all we hear, we think all this must be true. We hear **voices** because we have been staring so long at the **darkness** within, our own ignorance and craving. That Darkness then talks back to us: this is what we keep hearing even now, as we read this.

When we let go of this voice, and recall some really Dhamma-inspired teaching on impermanence, suffering or non-self, we may just catch a glimpse how true all this is. We have been cleverly conning ourself into believing our own self-promoting "one-third" BS about ourself. We are missing all the rest of true reality that will make us a full person, even a true individual, who is self-reliant and joyfully free in the Dhamma sense.

Know Māra, rout Māra

Now, even as a full person—a joyful individual who lives the Dhamma by seeing the reality of impermanence—we still hear voices, but it is mostly those of the **truth and beauty** of life as it really is, and what it can be. This is like **seeing** the radiant Buddha under the Bodhi tree from afar; we are slowly approaching the Buddha so that we can see him ever more clearly.

This is the voice that I hear as I write this, and whenever I write those reflections that you enjoy reading. Some of them we may not enjoy reading because they seem to be too revealing, and this annoys us (understandably). The suttas often tell stories about how Māra (the personification of our ignorance and craving) keeps us feeling puffed up with our 1/3 knowledge and entitlement, or to fear being our true good self. Māra is exposed when we **know** him for what he really is; then, that hot-air bubble that we are bursts.

Out of the cocoon

We may think that our bubble has burst because we have been falsely impressed by a big bubble of hot air (which is really smelly, too, by the way). The Guru wants us to remain as bubbly Caterpillars forever; not even to pupate in our cocoon, to grow. At best, the Guru decides when we should pupate, when we can emerge from our cocoon. Then, we emerge deformed just the way the Guru wants us, so that we are always in his image and shadow.

The reality is that when we keep hearing the Dhamma's voice, we keep growing like a caterpillar in its cocoon. At the right time, we are ready to break out of our cocoon, let our body and wings dry rightly, spread our wings, and fly happily in the open bright space of true freedom. We have heard the Dhamma voice of freedom.

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