

## You, monkey

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The so called “3 wise monkeys” have been around long before us. Every major culture claims the idea originated with them. Great social ideas often arise independently from the wise in such cultures. One ancient source of the 3 monkeys can be seen at the Tōshō-gū shrine in Nikkō, Japan [Figure 1].



Figure 1: Three Wise Monkeys carving on the stable of Toshog Shrine, Nikko, Japan.

When I was a kid, I was told that these 3 monkeys teach us to “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.” Like most sayings amongst the Chinese (which was my background), such sayings are convenient and devious ways of turning us into “kuai” (obedient) children, who turn into obsequious adults and good Asian Buddhists. In other words, it is a means of social control.

### Why monkey?

Why use the **monkeys** to highlight human mischiefs? The easiest answer is that monkeys don’t fight back or ask for royalties. A more serious reason (which may be beyond many of us) is the Buddhist idea of the “monkey mind,” which is mentioned in **the Assutava Sutta 1** (S 12.61,8), SD 20.2. The monkey mind jumps from tree to tree (the tree represents our body, speech and mind: the 3 doors of karma).

If we have a good chance to observe a monkey swinging from tree to tree: he deftly grasps one branch, lets it go, and almost at once, grasps another. On a deeper, unimaginable level (for most), it means that our mind quickly moves from mind-object to mind-object. It always needs an object. Notice how our own monkey mind does that as we read this!

For meditators or exemplary Buddhists (like yourself: No? sorry, just a bad example), the 3 monkeys should mean: LOOK not, HEAR not, SPEAK not. This helps in meditation. Anyway, since you are the actual meditation expert, you would say: Oh, we only need to be mindful when we see, hear and speak. Right: Now we know why we need the 3 monkeys.

### The monkey in us

We are all monkeys deep down in our genomes, or just deep down. We love monkeying around with Buddhism, so why only 3 monkeys? Why not 4 monkeys! Yes, we do have the 4 monkeys, and they are so lovable, especially the last one. [Figure 2]

Yes, you are right, Monkey 4 is smiling. He is shielding his genitals. If you are offended, please stop reading right away. Right, since you are still reading, let me explain (if only more readers are as open as you!) The Seeing Monkey represents the karmic door that is the eye; the

Hearing Monkey, the ear-door; and the Talking Monkey, the speech-door. The mind-door is missing! You at once intelligently retort: That's the 4<sup>th</sup> monkey!

Sorry, I have to force this last imagery because that's the cartoon I found. Blame Google if you must: I'm only the messenger. The 4<sup>th</sup> monkey perhaps got it wrong (it's a monkey after all): What do monkeys think of most often other than the first 3 monkeying. Time to practise what the 3 monkeys preach! Anyway, it all starts in the mind, so please don't blame me if your mind went astray.

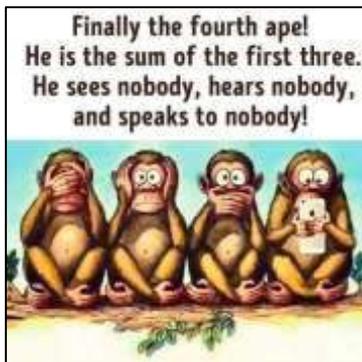


**Figure 2:** The 4 wise monkeys.

Author: Bildforyou7; source:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Four\\_wise\\_monkeys.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Four_wise_monkeys.jpg)

Now, there is another quartet of monkeys. This one is really for our times. In this cartoon, they are called apes. So I'll be the apes now: you can **read** the cartoon for yourself [Figure 3].



**Figure 3:** The 4 apes.

I wonder if you are somehow, at some level, deeply offended by what has been said or not said. But if you can laugh at all this, you can see the bright side of every darkness. We need more of you, or rather more such spontaneous joy in times like this.

Happy monkeying!

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