

Please blow my balloon

One of the easiest ways to make a person happy is to nicely feed his pet delusions. If we can smilingly say “yes,” or “I agree,” or “you’re right,” we easily become popular. We can say the nicest things that others want to hear, or sensibly remaining silent on matters of sensitivity. People always love a good listener and the yes-man.

Now let’s reverse the roles. We are now the person who feels elated when others feed our delusions. They smilingly say “yes,” or “I agree,” or “you’re right.” We simply love such agreeable people. They say the nicest things that we want to hear. We always love a good listener.

Now there is a third person, the most important, someone we often forget, that is, we ourselves. Are we really aware that we feel elated, truly or falsely, when others feed our delusions? Do we realize that we are only happy when we think others approve of us? Do we know that our wellbeing is actually dependent on how others treat us? Is so, then we need people to blow up our balloons: we are emotionally dependent.

People can say yes to us for many reasons, most of them unlikely to be what we make it out to be, or hope it to be – unless we can really read their minds. People might say the nicest things to us, again for all the wrong reasons. Perhaps, even those people do not really know the real reasons themselves. Maybe they are afraid to be wrong, or they are simply afraid of us.

There is nothing much we can really do to effectively change all those who have “wrong” opinions about us. Indeed, it is not even a worthwhile effort to try to do so, because people are like sea-waves that change with the tides and lunar cycles. Furthermore, how many people must we change before we think they think highly of us.

We could try to change how others think of us, perhaps by sprucing up our looks, or dressing more smartly, or speaking in a more sophisticated tone, or impressing people with how much we know, and so on. This can really be tiresome after a while when we realize there are simply too many people to convert.

Or, worse, there are those who might actually know what we are trying to do, and perhaps just humour us. Then we realize, too late, that we are merely gesturing and dancing to their tunes. We are then mere hollow men, waiting to be filled by the fodder of others.

All these games people play with each other depend on the fact that we are looking outwards, and all we really see are surfaces and masks. We are a tribe of masked beings; we keep changing masks as we dance around the spaces and corners of our lives. That is why we enjoy going home or going for holidays. For then, we can really be ourselves – sometimes.

If we really want to enjoy our homes and holidays better, we need to turn the lights inwards more often. We need to see and understand who really are pulling our heart’s strings, making us dance to tunes of emotional dependence. We are controlled by five back-seat drivers called EYE, EAR, NOSE, TONGUE and BODY. They are block capitalized because they are very powerful, the real masters of the unwary.

EYE tells us to measure others by how they appear to us. To look beautiful means, we think, is to feel pleasurable. To be well-dressed means, we tell ourselves, to be of a high class, and as such worth our respect. Certain skin colours, we decide (probably unconsciously) have a higher value than others. So the EYE blinds us.

EAR tells us to grade others by sound and speech. Someone with a sweet or suave voice must surely be good. When a voice says things that we find agreeable, we at once think the person is right. When a person stutters or cannot speak well, we might discount him, or gratifyingly think we are better. So the EAR deafens us.

The real ruler of our lives is the MIND, that puts together the ideas and images that we paste onto the world we see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Few of us ever really poke a hole through this mental wallpaper to see what really lies beyond. In fact, most of us are fascinated with this sense-surround we have enveloped ourselves in.

Then one day, someone or something, pokes a hole through this balloon of ours. First, we might be shocked by the loss of something so familiar to us. Then, we might be angry that we had been deluded. Then, we try to find someone to blame, but this only burst more balloons.

The best person to blame is actually we ourselves, for it is easier for us to change and correct ourselves than to point fingers at others. Better still it is not to blame anyone. If there is anyone, or anything, to be blamed, it should be conditions. The more carefully we examine the conditions that have brought about the problem, the more likely we are to discover the solution and to know ourselves better.

If we care to regularly remind ourselves of the good that we are and the good that we have – our positive qualities, loved ones that we have, and the worthwhile things we are capable of – we have a better idea of what we should do next.

Once I saw a memorable 1962 Punch magazine cartoon. It shows an angel standing curiously high above a crowd of people. Someone in the crowd sees the angel, points him out, and everyone else looks up at the angel with interest. The angel, befuddled by the sudden attention, looks up to see what is attracting the crowd! Please reflect on this beautiful parable.¹

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¹ Punch, 21 March 1962, <http://punch.photoshelter.com/image/I0000i4tmwiHyNTI>