

Change please!

There is movement all around, from the biggest wheel there is down to the tiniest atoms. Even the highest mountains and tallest buildings move, and are made of incessantly moving atoms. A time will come when even our moving galaxy will collapse into nothingness, into a black hole. And then, in due course, a new universe will move into being. The whole cosmos pulsates like a cosmic heartbeat.

We, too, change: we mature, move through life, age and die. Our minds are ever moving with thoughts. Our living bodies are never really ever still: it is moving incessantly down to the very cells that form our bodies.

We are like the tiny seeds that grow into plants and trees, flowering, fruiting, spreading our seeds, and becoming earth again. We are like the tiny droplets forming clouds filling the skies, moving, falling down into mountains, rivers, lakes, seas and oceans, only to rise up again into water vapour all over again. Yet very few of us really change.

Like animals, we are born, feed, grow, play, work, breed, age, and die. We spread our seeds just like the plants, but we grow only in body and brain: we do not change at all. Animals might be able to move much more freely than plants can. But no matter where we move to, very few of us really change for the better.

Like plants and animals, we sink our roots to seek security and food. Like plants and animals, we flee from the dark and from fear. We raise our limbs skyward for the light. We grow, flower, fruit, seed, spread, grow over and again, but without change.

Again and again, we study hard;
Again and again, the exams come;
Again and again, the results show;
Again and again, we look for jobs.

Again and again, we get hired;
Again and again, we face the day;
Again and again, the traffic jams;
Again and again, we're late for work;
Again and again, we get fired.

Again and again, we are born, and then we die;
Again and again, we're buried, burned or drowned;
Again and again, back to earth, fire, water and wind;
Again and again, our loved ones pray and cry;
Again and again, we are born and reborn;
Like plants we grow, like animals we move:
Who really see change are truly happy and free.¹

Why are we caught in such a cycle? First answer: Because we think of it as a cycle. Second answer: We see it as a repetitive boring routine. Third: We expect something out of it, usually for our own security and happiness. Fourth: We take it merely as work to be completed, not enjoyed. Fifth: We are afraid we have nothing else to do.

Here's a more positive way of looking at life. First, live one day at a time: take it as a moment to breathe. Second, boring is as boring thinks; smile kindly at your work. Third, in between meals, play and rest: having something to do is fun. Fourth, befriend the

¹ See **Time and time again** = SD 16.13: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/16.13-Time-and-time-again-piya.pdf>

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people around us; they probably feel low, too. Fifth, our work is finished before we know it.

So how can we really change for the better? Perhaps, we should first ask: Do we really need to change? Like it or not, we do actually change; it's just that either we do not notice it or we simply keep rejecting it. As we mature over the years, we begin to "wise up," as they say, meaning that we are better at recognizing patterns and predictability of human behaviour.

To change, in a positive sense, is to be able let go of past memories and negative images of ourselves. Sometimes some past pain might stun and stunt us right to the present moment. In that case, we need to cultivate lovingkindness, reinforcing that we fully forgive ourselves and accept ourselves just as we are. Then constantly recall happy moments in our lives and the goodness in the people we love.

One of the Buddha's last instructions to us is not to worship him in a religious or external way. He declares that the "supreme worship," the best way to respect him, is to practise his teachings. Firstly, keep our bodies and speech healthy, and respect others. Secondly, learn to relax with calm breathing, letting go of our thoughts, and learning to simply feel the moment's peace. Thirdly, keep asking ourselves what do we learn from all this, including the troubles we face.

Buddhism is not about being a member of a group or a follower of some famous, even highly attained, teacher. Our one and only teacher is the Buddha himself, and he is our true refuge, our personal ideal of awakening. Buddhism is not about affiliation, but about attitude: only we can really change ourselves for the better (Dh 160, 380).

Even though the Buddha has passed away into final nirvana, his living teachings can still teach us to purify our actions, calm our minds, and gain liberating wisdom. In this way, the Buddha still continues to help us through the Dharma. A very effective way to benefit from his teaching, is to devote ourselves to studying the suttas, the living word of the Buddha's teaching.

In time, we will be moved to meet other Dharma-minded Buddhists. If we have some meditation training based on the Buddha's teachings in the suttas, then we continue to build and grow our communion of true-hearted Dharma friends. Then, as we move through life, we also change for the better.

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