

[Somdet Phra Buddhacharn](#) (Kiew) passed away on Saturday, 10 August, at the age of 85 in Bangkok. He was the Deputy Supreme Patriarch and abbot of Wat Srales (the Golden Mount), Bangkok, where Piya was ordained as a monk in 1972 and trained for 5 years. Luangphor Kiew was a learned, caring and disciplined teacher who nurtured the quality of conduct and wisdom of monastics both Thai and foreign. This reflection is a gesture of respect and love for him. May he attain the bliss of nirvana.

More than human

We humans are amongst the weakest of all living species. We are neither the fastest nor the biggest species. We are not even the cleverest of beings. But we are capable of being kind to one another, to love others. In doing so, we are able to bring about big meaningful changes that affect all of our species.

Our eyes are not the sharpest there is. Other lesser animals, very much smaller than us, have much better eyes. We are not able to see very far, but these very same eyes give us the vision that helps us surpass all other species. And when we close our eyes, we see beyond what other eyes can see. Above all, we see our true selves that lie hidden deep within us, more precious than any hidden treasure.

Our ears are not as keen as those of many other animals that are able to pick up the slightest rustle. Our ears find it almost impossible to understand the sounds of beasts and birds, who easily and expertly communicate with one another. But our ears are capable of listening to the most beautiful music that is senseless to even the most intelligent of animals.

Our ears are not only sensitive to the words of others, especially those like us, but we can also sense sounds of non-humans, of animals, birds and machines. We are moved, we are stilled by sounds we hear as soothing, pleasant or meaningful. With sounds we create music and joy in a way that that no other non-human can. On account of such sounds, we enjoy beauty and truth.

We are able to distinguish between noise and words, between good sound and bad noise, between music and beauty, and see goodness in silence. All the sounds that we hear are not really from out there. They all arise at the door called the ear. To hear is to attend to those sounds at the ear-door. This door opens into an inner space, the home of all sounds, our heart.

When we hear this – that our heart is the source of all the sounds we hear – we begin to understand that we only hear what we want to hear. They are merely sounds; we make sense of them; we give meaning to them; becoming wise, we free them. We need to reflect on this more deeply (take a moment off from reading this, if you like.)¹

The most liberating sound we can hear is the voice of silence. In our inner stillness, we are empowered to better hear others and listen to the clear voice of joy and peace resounding within our being. We hear what sounds cannot convey nor words conjure. These are the silent spaces that make music possible and language meaningful. For, after all have been heard and done, said and loved, only blissful silence remains. Like the stillness of the setting sun.

Our tongue is surely the most powerful weapon we have, a weapon whose effects may still work even after the rest of us stop working. It is sharper, deadlier than any weapon. When used without a clear mind, this tongue can hurt even the dearly loved. It can bring about pain and hurt to many, friends and foe alike. If we have power over others, whether through

¹ For language and psychotherapy (ACT), see **Buddhism as a method of self-healing**, SD 43.1 esp (2.1): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/43.1-Buddhism-as-a-method-of-self-healing-piya.pdf>

religion or ideology (they are the same really), then we hurt, even destroy, on a more massive scale.

The tongue is not an untasting ladle or spoon: it tastes what it touches, touched by what it tastes. A caring tongue helps and heals us with solace and peace. Loving words, that lovingly bring and hold together, that instruct and free, loving words of truth. Such words move crowds to build civilization, culture, and community so that we are never alone, but together in health, happiness and holiness.

Civilization and society are only possible when we struggle against similar odds, share the same dream, and speak in the same tongue of togetherness despite our diversity. We joyfully celebrate humanity in our diversity, connecting ourselves harmoniously like brooks, streams and rivers flowing over a beautiful land into the sea.

We are not merely bodies, but persons who speak for ourselves, who value freedom and difference; above all, we value wisdom. Many of us are empty vessels, full of holes, through which leak watery words flowing without cease. Some of us are empty caves, silent, echoing only what we hear. Yet any of us can be strong casks of rich wine and sweet grape-juice, flowing only when the tap is opened by gentle loving hands with waiting tankards to fill the flow.

At the peak of our being is the mind. It is not located anywhere, but we can imagine it is our heart, because it is in the centre of our lives. Our mind can be small, or it can be big, even boundless. When we think, we try to define and limit the heart. If we know how to truly feel, we free our heart. Only then do we really know ourselves.

The human brain is not the largest brain there is: it is, for example, smaller than that of an elephant, or even that of a bottlenose dolphin.² The human brain is unique in its flexibility, which allows us the intelligence to solve problems in diverse and unexpected ways, which can then be shared with the rest of the family or tribe. Above all, it helps us to be aware of ourselves. By the same token we are also aware of others, so that we developed moral ethics, the basis or rules of adaptive personal conduct and social progress.³

How do we really know ourselves? This realization probably reinforced itself when humans began to notice images of themselves in water. We must at first have thought that it was someone else reflected therein. But when we saw the identical images of our fellows, how they and their images move in full synchrony, we began to be more self-aware.

Dreams, too, had a powerful effect on our ancestors. They must have feared or rejoiced at them, even took them to be portents of things to come. Such experiences were probably the basis for beliefs in other worlds and the stuff of myths and legends. The wiser amongst us then began to distinguish between reality and fantasy.

The forces of nature powerfully shaped our lives and mind. We learned that after a while even our near and dear ones would stop moving, speaking and breathing. We notice how their physical bodies returned to the elements, and wondered, even wished, if there were something that persisted beyond such regular losses. For millennia we were unsure of what this “survivor” is, so we came up with so many imaginative and wishful ideas.

Most of us thought that it must have something to do with the breath, and called it the “soul.” Such ideas became more refined and sophisticated, and as more of us gathered into cities and civilizations, such ideas were used to control others so that society is possible. This is called “religion.”

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brain_size.

³ On meditation and the human brain, see **Meditation and consciousness**, SD 17.8c (6): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/17.8c-Meditation-consciousness.-piya1.pdf>

The wisest among us – with his unparalleled power of observation and intuition – noticed that nothing remains the same for even a moment. Whatever exists must do so in time, and meaning is only possible in change, and the mind makes sense of all this. There is no abiding entity, no soul – only passing consciousness.

From all this, he realizes that we must accept change, but we can influence it to our benefit. Only in change do we grow. We metamorphose from crawling caterpillar to free-flying butterfly. This is good. If we reject change, then pain arises. It is unnatural to do so: we are going against nature. Understanding the good is called “truth.” A good feeling that inspires and empowers us live more fully and joyfully is called “beauty.”

The man who discovers this and frees our hearts to this truth and beauty is the Buddha. By this truth we are human; by this beauty we are beyond human. Knowing both beauty and truth set us free.

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