

The little that we know

Buddhism is not about knowing itself: it is not even about itself – it is about each of us knowing ourself. This makes early Buddhism unique, unlike any other religion. Gurus, clever with words and cunning with ways, turn the Buddha on his head and usurp his place. Those of us who have freed ourselves from gurus, rejoice in being able to see the lone Buddha sitting radiantly under the spacious bodhi tree. Little do we know that the Buddha is always there, right there in our own hearts.

There are professional scholars who try to master Buddhism for a purpose and profit; and there are those who love Buddhism and studiously help us understand Buddhism better. There are Buddhists who do not know, even dislike, suttas; and there are Buddhists who know the suttas' vital value in helping us cultivate our minds and hearts.

Notice how when we try to learn or teach Abhidhamma without any sutta understanding, we feel a rush of power and fire that we now know everything, and that others are mere fools, or at least do not know as much as we do. Then, as we mature in the ways of the world, we turn to fengshui and fads, or become New Age gurus. Underlying all this, if we carefully scratch its veneer, is the lust to have.

The fires still rage on inside us. We lust after what we think we lack. We lust after those who admire and patronize us: we love it when they look at our body. We hate those who reject us, or even talk something different from what we hold dear. We simply blur up when we look within and see nothing there. It's good when people don't know what's not there. So we think.

We often pride in claiming that the Heart Sutra or Emptiness is about being empty of this and empty of that. Yet, our heads are full of views, arrogance, and stray thoughts; it's never empty at all. We claim everything is empty. Yet, we talk so much about it. Perhaps, we must be right. After all, empty vessels make the most noise.

These words may seem foolhardy to some, perhaps they're right – but I don't care about being criticized for it. Or, do I, perhaps, actually enjoy the criticisms, even the harsh words? They are talking about ME: it feeds MY ego!

The reality is that I'm dying. To know that my life is ending, I'm moved by the courage and urgency to speak truly and usefully. After all, what's the worst that can happen? Life is a terminal disease: we must all die.

Even if death is not the end for Buddhists (there's rebirth), we are leaving behind this place and those self-serving scholars, gurus and those who shape Buddhism with their mouths. If we cannot teach them the simplest thing about Buddhism (and they are trying to teach *us*), the next best thing is to die *from* them. We neither need nor deserve them. They need us. We have been conned and abused all this while: it's time to end it all.

We live with the delusion that we will not die today, tomorrow, or the day after. Indeed, we delude ourself with the notion that we will *not* die. Or, we forget, or wish to forget, that we will die. This is a most costly delusion: it means everything has no value (for value comes from impermanence, as does meaning). When we realize that time, at least, *our* time, is limited, then, we will truly value it.

When we value time, we value life. Life is all that we really *are*. Time is not what we *have*: time is what we *are*. Then, we have all the time in the world – the time to grow joyfully.

Life is the most precious thing that we *have* because without it nothing else matters. Life, then, like time, is all that we *have*, but it lasts only a moment. So it is precious. We need to care for it: we must feed it, comfort it, and keep it healthy. Above all, we must feed it with joy, comfort it with happiness, keep it healthy with wisdom, and watch it grow. For, what is life otherwise?

Joy is our very first taste of what nirvana is like. But, nirvana is forever. Only here “forever” seems to make sense. For the unawakened, joy is the space and eternity that heaven seems to be. Its opposite is the crowded life, which is hell itself. In short, joy is true freedom, even if a momentary one.

We must be able to see and understand the truth underlying all this. For, they are the very bases of our personal being, the bases of what is good and wholesome. They are the spring-board from which we rise through mental cultivation to the heights of divinity and beyond. It is what meditation is really about.

Meditation has no fixed point. Any point we think we have mentally grasped – even if it is the breath, especially if it is the breath – is a point of passing moment. Our life, too, has no fixed point, no dead centre. Even the present moment is passing within a single sentence, within a single word, a single breath. We can never fathom a moment, and yet we are experiencing it right now. Simply, this means learning: we must keep on learning and growing.

The universe, too, has no fixed point. If there must be one, let it be where we are sitting right now: that’s the centre of our universe. Or better, we can say that the spot under the bodhi tree where the Buddha sits is the real centre of the universe, from which true peace emanates.

If we dwell deep enough into our meditation, we may see that our mind is inner space, a universe without any fixed point (just as the external universe is “everywhere,” without a fixed point). Once we think we have found such a fixed point, we lose our meditation, our inner peace and insight. There is no point to it all!

Then, we must direct these open eyes of clear vision to see how we construct our world. We construct megachurches and try to wall God in, or chain Him to our beliefs. We see God with faith and hope – in other words, we can only believe, but not really *know* such a Being.

We create “eternal” Buddhas in our image till we have more Buddhas than we can possibly worship. Yet, **the supreme worship**, declares the one Buddha, is to turn away from images, give up idol worship, and look within with wisdom. Yet, there is a way out: we reflect that all these Buddhas are but aspects of the historical Buddha. For without Sakyamuni, there would be no Buddhism.

So much has been written and said. All this seems to be nothing, if we think about it. That’s the point of the final word on Buddhism and all that we value in life. We do not need to think too much, if at all. Mere thinking often goes in circles or hit a wall. It’s the feeling – directly experiencing the moment – that we need to work on.

We don’t really need to know much to *feel* the moment. The little that we know, beginning right here and now, will do. Indeed, the less we know right now, the better. Then, we are ready to live the moment: we simply cannot *think* the moment! We need to feel and live it.

Meditation can be said to be of two kinds: inner and outer. Inner meditation is when we direct our mind with calm and clarity inwardly, letting go of all wishes and thoughts, and

simply enjoying the blissful space within. Outer meditation is our mindfulness of others, just as they are: we accept them unconditionally; we respond to their wholesome needs even when they do not deserve it; we rejoice in their goodness; and we calmly look on undaunted even when the good we have done does not seem to have their full effect on others. We will know what to do next. We start all over again, as it were, with renewed diligence and wisdom.

Now, we need to return to the start of this reflection, so that we can move on: Buddhism is about knowing oneself. When we say this, we begin to feel our body, the most obvious part of us. Now that we know we have a body, try to feel the knowing. It's not located anywhere, just as the mind is not located anywhere. Yet, it is everywhere. It is where we direct it. It goes as far as we range it. When we truly understand our own mind, we begin to understand others, too.

This is really to be open-minded. An open mind feels life right where it is, wherever we are. Wherever it is, we are only present when we feel this very moment, when we directly feel it. That is all we need to know; that is all that can be known. It may seem little, but that is quite a lot to take in – for the moment.

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