

The Story of A Butterfly

The writer of this beautiful story, often found on the Internet, is unknown. Like any good story, it has different meanings for different people. The story has a profound connection for me as it helps me relate closely to the Buddha's teaching of self-reliance in personal development. First, let us look at the story:

"A man found a pupa of a butterfly. One day a small opening appeared. He sat and watched the butterfly for several hours as it struggled to squeeze its body through the tiny hole. Then it stopped, as if it couldn't go further.

So the man decided to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bits of cocoon. The butterfly emerged easily but it had a swollen body and shriveled wings.

The man continued to watch it, expecting that any minute the wings would enlarge and expand enough to support the body. Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around. It was never able to fly.

What the man in his kindness and haste did not understand: The restricting cocoon and the struggle required by the butterfly to get through the opening was a way of forcing the fluid from the body into the wings so that it would be ready for flight once that was achieved.

Sometimes, struggles are exactly what we need in our lives. Going through life with no obstacles would cripple us. We will not be as strong as we could have been and we would never happily fly.

So have a nice day; struggle a little and learn well."

For me, this is a powerful reminder of how Buddhist meditation gently allows us to evolve and grow in a cocoon of calm and stillness, so that we can accept ourselves just as we are. This may sound simplistic, even trite. The point is how many of us really accept ourselves as we really are. We do not even know ourselves.

How do we end up like the maimed butterfly? We maim our emotional selves, we stunt our spiritual growth, when we keep measuring ourselves against others, or when we blindly allow our lives to be dictated by others. When what controls us is from outside of ourselves, we clearly do not have self-control. Our happiness is defined and decided by others. In other words, we can never be really happy.

We must constantly ask ourselves what we are thinking, or saying or doing: "Am I happy doing this?" If we are, we must then ask, "Am I hurting myself doing this; am I hurting others; am I hurting the environment?" If "no" in all three counts, then that's fine. If there is even one "yes," we need to ask why, and adjust our actions accordingly.

On the other hand, when we ask, "Am I happy doing this?" And the answer is "no," we need to ask ourselves again, "Why so? Why am I not happy?"

Occasionally, try to visualize yourself having achieved our life's goal (following the guidelines we have just listed). Then, we work our way backwards: what must we do to attain this goal? And

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what must we do before that, and so on, until we arrive at where we are now. We are then better aware of what we need to do with our lives.

If we have done all we can, and things still do not seem to work our way, then we need to reflect on the butterfly story. We are still evolving in our karmic cocoon; let things be for a while. Do what needs to be done for the present. And keep asking oneself: What do I do next? Don't think, just feel, be at peace with oneself: we will hear the answer soon enough.

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