

We are not born human

We are born with only a human body; we are not born human. The humanizing begins with our human parents. Parents who nourish their children with both solid food and the food of love, especially for the first formative seven years of our lives, provide us with the best conditions of a human state.

This is the key reason, amongst others, why we should be grateful to them. Conversely, this is what defines a parent, that is, not merely a biological condition for birth, but also the humanizing of us. More broadly, whoever raises us to be humans, and good humans, too, have truly parented us. They are our true creator-God, and our first teachers.¹

There are accounts of feral children, who were raised by wolves or monkeys, since they were infants. Apparently, those rescued early (while still infants or prepubescent) could be humanized, but attempts, even by scientists and experts, at socializing those who were older proved to be impossible or never completely successful.²

The Bāla Paṇḍita Sutta (M 129) (the discourse on the wise and the foolish) says that those who are attached to the faculty of taste (without cultivating the higher faculties, especially the mind) are reborn as plant-feeding animals. Those who make a living from religious rituals, like the sacrificial brahmins or the commercialized priests of our own times, would be reborn as dirt-feeding animals (like chickens, pigs and dogs).³

Others who fail to sustain their lives as true humans, often falling into subhuman behaviour, habitually have minds of those kinds of beings. They may have human bodies, but they are aggressive in reaping profits and success, exploiting others and measuring them in terms of selfish gains and money. They are virtual titans or asuras, violent grasping demons.

Those who simply live cyclic lives of merely looking for food and fun, with predictable emotions, and a lack of the desire for learning, are virtual animals (who are born, feed, play, reproduce, and die). They live in the dark, or in water, or in filth. They eat each other and prey on the weak. Because of the lack of spiritual life, no doing of what is wholesome, in such states, it is very difficult for such animals to gain the human state (Dh 182).⁴

Those habitually addicted to some kinds of substances, or never really enjoying anything, no matter how much they may have, are virtual shades or pretas. Those who are regularly violent and intolerant, caught up in killing one another, mass bombing others and being bombed themselves, are in a virtual hell state.

This is the myth of the five destinies—the devas, the humans, the animals, the pretas, and the hell-beings,⁵ and the myth of the six realms, including the asuras. These mythical beings lurk in the shadows of our minds, ever ready to transmogrify themselves into our consciousness, dehumanizing and deluding us, and destroying many. We are rarely aware of these states when we fall into them. Only in keeping to the basic rules of humanity—the five precepts⁶—are we safe from sinking into these subhuman shadows.

¹ *Brahmā'ti mātā, pitaro, pubb'ācariyā'ti vuccare* (A 1:132, 2:70 f; It 110; J 5:330 f).

² Many accounts of feral children were, however, false or invented for dubious purposes. For references, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feral_child.

³ **Bāla Paṇḍita Sutta** (M 129.18-19/3:167 f) = SD 2.22.

⁴ See also "Becoming human: it's easier than you think" (Revisioning Buddhism, 2011: ch 2).

⁵ **Pañca, gati Sutta** (A 9.68/4:459) = SD 2.20.

⁶ See **Veḷu, dvāreyya Sutta** (S 55.75/5:352-356) = SD 1.5.

The five precepts are the minimum standards of being human. They are the quality control for our human lives. When we keep our precepts well, we will never fall into such subhuman states, or worse, be reborn into them, and spend unimaginably long periods in those unhappy states.

The five precepts are the bases for our moral training, so that we cultivate moral virtue that keeps us truly human. The first precept is to value life (the first and foremost universal value). The second is to respect the happiness of others, which behoove us not to take away by theft and fraud what rightly belongs to others. The third precept against sexual misconduct is really about respect for personal freedom, the right of a person to say “no.”

The fourth precept, that of refraining from false speech, is about wholesome communication. Basically, what we communicate should be truthful, should promote good friendship and social harmony, should be pleasant and proper, and should in some way be beneficial, if not, instructive.

While the first three precepts are about right action of our body, the fourth is about our speech. Along with the mind, the body and speech constitute the three “doors” of karma or morally efficacious action. They are actions, conscious or unconscious, which bear similar consequences upon us, after committing them.

The fifth precept, that of refraining from intoxicants and addictive substances, is to keep the mind free as a basis for inner calm and clarity. Indeed, if we are intoxicated or unmindful, we are more likely to break any or all of the other humanizing precepts.

When our moral virtue is strong, we are free from fear and guilt of things done or undone, so that our hearts easily enjoy a deep level of inner peace. This is our “divinizing” process, as it were. We are naturally able to feel and show unconditional love, even without religion. We are easily compassionate to others, being kind to them even when they do not deserve it. We simply feel happy at the happiness of others. And when things do not go right, our hearts are clearly calm so that we, untroubled by negative emotions, simply do what needs to be done next.⁷

Through keeping the precepts, our good works become truly effective. We are not merely *showing* that we are good: we *are* really good. Through our moral virtue, we enjoy heaven here and now. More importantly, it is easier to become a streamwinner, one who has boarded the safe and sure boat down the stream to nirvana in this life itself.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha’s Example and Teachings]

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⁷ See (Alabbhanīya) *Ṭhāna Sutta* (A 5.48) = SD 42.1.