

An empty plate

[Originally posted as fb180531 on Facebook]

For the best of Buddhists, practice and work are the same sane thing. This is not some Zen flourish, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. The joyful silence of Assaji is his practice; Sāriputta sees it and becomes a streamwinner. Sāriputta goes on to tell his soulmate, Moggallāna, about it, and he, too, becomes a streamwinner. They meet the Buddha and both become arhats. They all love the Dharma and show it: their practice and work are the same.

The key difference between academic scholarship and spiritual experience is just that: the former is scholarship (the wrangling over the word) and the latter, experience (the tasting of the truth). The fruits of the former usually means that we have proven our relevance and earned a living, while the latter is that of a better self-understanding and a sense of inner light and space, the touch of truth and beauty, even personal liberation.

Words

Even if we take Buddhism at its word, it is more like a great novel than some scientific theory or ancient records of some worldly events. We may analyze a great novel, say, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, but it is really meant to be simply read and enjoyed as is. Since parallels do not meet, the comparison ends here. We don't merely read the suttas and enjoy them, although this is often possible and worthwhile.

The suttas are neither merely historical records nor merely literary documents. They are like **a computer programme in computer language**—they are repetitive not merely because of they are based on an oral tradition, but mainly because the truth is teased out by our seeing the pattern of mental processes—the mind habitually repeats itself ad nauseam—but we seem not to notice it at all.

By “becoming” the programme, like a wholesome version of Neo and other heroes in “The Matrix” movie series, we are, through meditation, transported onto a mental level, where “all” things begin, become and end in a loop. At this fundamental level, we are able to tweak things, and, in time, even to stop this loop—and awaken from the programme. Here again, at this point, the parallel parts.

Music

Our experience of the suttas should be like reading and running the coded instructions or personal messages from the Buddha and the early arhats. The suttas are, after all, records of their meditative experiences, mental attainments and spiritual liberation. We may argue whether the programmer/s existed, or even whether the composer/s of such beautiful music existed or not. It is not even the point that whether a beautiful piece of music such as the Moonlight Sonata must have a composer.

But today, with information overdrive and global communication, we easily forget our divinity—what more to speak of our spirituality. We lay hold of a soft copy of Eliot's

Middlemarch and switch the paragraphs around, change the words, and write our own ending. We get down into a computer programme, delete a symbol here, a phrase there, switch around a few lines--and oh the programme is too long. let's shorten it. We put a music score before us and change the key and the timing, we add a few notes here and there, and play it on the wrong instruments. Some of us actually find this to be an accomplishment—just as Sisyphus finds his rock-pushing and rock-running an accomplishment.

Oneness

The point remains that we should let the computer programme run itself unmolested; we should simply but attentively listen to the piece as it transforms us with inner peace and bliss. The computer programme runs its magic; we become the magic. We become the music; the music becomes us—there is just the listening, the bliss, the oneness.

The suttas, then, give us theoretical paradigms, training guidance, case-studies and rare records of the evolution and transformation of ordinary humans into the Buddha and the arhats.

The true test, then, is in the pudding: we do not need to see the chef before we enjoy a good dish. Neither do we need to thank the chef after every meal, though it would be a privilege to. Yet, the greatest compliment to a chef is for us to attentively enjoy our meal and leave the platter clean.

An empty plate is our best compliment to the chef. An empty mind can hold everything. An empty heart frees itself with unconditional love. But don't think too much about this when our mind is full and our heavy heart.

"Ha! hold my Brain; be still my beating Heart."

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