

Dedicated to THE LONE BUDDHISTS of the world:

VESAK QUESTIONS

What the Buddha teaches us today
[Previously published as fb 220515 Piya Tan]

The Buddha teaches us to ask questions about the most important things in our life. Hence, we must begin with the question:

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT IN LIFE?

Clearly, the Buddha is not referring to things, not even the world, over which we have no control. Maybe we should ask another question (counter-question) to understand this question better:

WHAT SHOULD I SEE AS BEING MOST IMPORTANT IN MY LIFE?

Here again, almost all the things in our life are impermanent. The things we “have,” even what we “are” (young, good-looking, rich, famous, learned) will change with time. Hence, we don’t really have full control over what we have or what we are.

However, there is one thing we seem to have, we seem to be, that does not seem to change. This is our SELF. So we think. Or, more correctly, our IDEA of ourself. This has not changed: so we think.

We can now better understand the question—What is most important in life?—as how we see ourself. Now, we must ask: **WHY AM I THE MOST IMPORTANT IN MY LIFE?**

This question makes a lot of sense when we examine **WHAT WE SHOULD AND CAN DO OURSELF** (notice: we don’t say: “With our self”). We cannot do much with other people, or even the world. Other people have their own lives: We may try to help some people all the time, or all the people some of the time; but we cannot help all the people all the time. The world changes as it will, like a cosmic clock.

IF I AM MOST IMPORTANT to me, it means that:

- (1) I should take care of my body: both my body and speech should be healthy.
- (2) I should take care of my mind: I should keep it calm and clear.

I can try to seek guidance and help from others, but if I don’t help myself no one can or will. In the end, no matter how much guidance or help I get, I still need to rely on myself to cultivate my body (and speech) and my mind. This is called **SELF-RELIANCE**.

In fact, without self-reliance, we are doomed to lose our body and our mind. Notice that when we are in a crowd, there are so many **BODIES**, and if the crowd moves too fast or too slow, in the wrong direction, then my body will follow, too. That’s the end of it!

My MIND, too, stops thinking clearly in a crowd. We look up to a Guru, a Power Figure in a crowd. We only follow what the Guru tells us to do and not to do. We don't ask questions; we don't know how to ask them. We don't have the chance to ask them. When we do ask them, we do not get real good answers. The crowd swallows up our body and numbs our mind. We are no more ourselves. There is no self-reliance.

As I write this, I am thinking, on this blessed day, of you LONE BUDDHISTS in various parts of the world. You may think you have neither teacher nor other Buddhists to be with. For the moment, it seems that way. Yet, this is our best chance to learn SELF-RELIANCE.

It's like living in the kingdom of the BLIND, but we can see even if we are a bit short-sighted. Even in the dark, our eyes will adjust and we can still see. The blind may think they know their way around, but our seeing eyes see what the blind do not. That is a great blessing to us.

Those who follow Crowd Buddhism only see their Guru and his Teachings. They are blind to true reality. They cannot grow. They are not only blind, they are but the shadows of the Guru. They don't even live their own lives. Hence, they have no self-reliance.

On this blessed day, we reflect on the lone Buddha sitting radiant, meditating under the Bodhi tree. We are like that bright lone Buddha. We may not be awakened (yet), but we know the joy, peace and wisdom of seeing THE BUDDHA.

In terms of self-reliance, when we see the Buddha, we also see THE DHAMMA, the Buddha's true teaching.

All things change: we can and must change, too.
There is suffering everywhere: everything is teaching us.
Suffering is the change that, with learning, brings wisdom.
As we age, we see that there is really no one suffering:
There is only suffering, arising and ending.

What we learn from others, even from the Buddha himself, are merely sign-posts pointing to where we should go, where the path is. This path is not some grand highway full of people, vehicles and distractions along the way. There is no path out there: The true path is within us.

Our journey starts when we love and respect our body and speech,
And love and respect the body and speech of others. This is called moral conduct.
Our journey continues when we calm and clear our mind.

By doing this, we are also teaching others that we can and must rely on ourselves:
We then empower them to see the truth and reality for themselves and be FREE.
This is TRUE LOVE: to see ourselves as others, and others as ourselves:
apart in life, yet a part of life,

As we act in this way, we journey on our path:
For, we are the path, the way of awakening.
This is the meaning of Vesak, Buddha Day, for the wise,
and those who are moved to bring wisdom to others.

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