

Reading minds

[Previously published as fb210610 Piya Tan]

The ability to read minds begins with watching behaviour patterns in others, being attentive, being calm oneself and reflecting the best in that person. Mind-reading is a vital skill for Dhamma teachers because we have to communicate the Dhamma effectively, to answer Dhamma questions satisfactorily, put another's heart at ease, and to keep oneself safe from the darkness in others.

On the other hand, people can be giving warning signs from the very start. They appear so natural and so harmless that we simply do not notice them. We even welcome such overtures; we feed them. So we strike up a friendship—so it seems. In fact, in many cases, such a friendship may actually work: so long as we are not really close with that person. The social distance keeps us from knowing the REAL person.

In other words, we do not really know the person. It's just touch and go, a series of FB likes, hearts, even laughs. Then, we turn off our computer; we are safely back in our own world.

(1) WHO PUT THEMSELVES FIRST

It is easy to read people on social media, like Facebook. Notice how some people like to post impressive pictures of themselves. When someone puts a photo of himself standing with a VIP, say, some President of a country, it simply means: I know important people. (More rightly, I like to take photos with VIPs.) I'm not even a firefly, so some borrowed light may help. It may also mean: if you are not important, I will not want to know you.

Or, someone put a well-dressed photo of himself smiling, looking very friendly. It means I want to be popular, like an election campaign photo. Be my friend, but I cannot spend much time with you, unless you are useful to me. I will try to help you but I cannot solve all your problems, or in fact any of them.

Or, we see a picture of someone sitting like the Buddha, dressed like a holy man, with lights around him. It means I want you to see me as a powerful teacher who can help you, but you have to agree with me completely. I don't know much, but if you listen fully to me, you can keep looking at me; worship me.

(2) WHO WANT US TO LOOK UP TO THEM

There are some who use titles (any kind), look holy, appear calm and silent (they seem not to talk much). We may be drawn to them because we think they look mindful and majestic. Maybe we had a stern unloving parent and feared them. We feel gratified when such people just smile at us. We are elated when they chat with us.

We only need to observe with whom these "holy men" appear calm and silent with, and with whom they chat like old friends. It is then not difficult to conclude what they are doing. Maybe they are looking for supporters and sponsors for their personal self-profit projects. We only talk silly, and waste their time which is reserved for those with means to patronize them.

So we get upset when they spurn us; we even talk bad about them. The reason for this is that we are still looking up to them, and want them to throw some crumbs of attention at us. What kind of person does that make us?

Holy people who use titles means that they have nothing else to offer us. The titles are fat worms they dangle on sharp hooks before the big fishes. If you notice that you are not big enough, lucky you. But keep away, since you may choke if you try to bite the bait.

(3) FROM SUPERSWEET TO SUPERBITTER

For some people, they appear supremely friendly, and anything seems to work. Everything we do, or what we are, is just right with them. They even seem to adore us. Then, one day, we seem to say just the WRONG thing. Actually, it is just the RIGHT thing, that triggers the truth button in such supersweet people.

That one word or one action triggered some old fear, pain or darkness. They are terrified at the haunting memory that has returned. Don't blame yourself: you are not the cause of that fallout. You may be the occasion, but not the cause of the person's weird reaction. In many ways, you are better off not associating with such an unstable and toxic person—unless you can help him or her.

(4) THE ONE AFRAID TO LEARN

Then, there is the person with the “eternal problem.” He starts off as someone with some ongoing issues. At first, he seems to connect with us, and enjoys our attention. We make some simple suggestions, and it seems to work for him. It works because it is simple, and we are good listeners.

Over time, we seem to know each other better, and we do not seem to have some things which that person seems to be looking for, we lose touch. Be thankful for that. Since the other path may not be so sweet. This troubled person sees in us some reflection of the source of his trouble. Usually, it is something we say, that this person is waiting for. Then, he concludes we are all like THAT: whomever or whatever is the source of that person's trouble.

He moves away to look for some new connection and starts the cycle of search again for “freedom” from the trouble, but he is actually biting his own tail: a uroboros devouring himself: the pain is self-inflicted. He only needs to stop biting himself, stop blaming himself; stop being caught in a loop seeing the same fault in himself in others, over and over again.

IT'S ABOUT YOU?

If you think I am writing about you, then you have a more serious problem than what is mentioned here. We are unique persons, but our problems make us common: it levels us with others. I notice troubling patterns and write about them so that we think more carefully about what's really going on. I look at the bigger picture and deeper significance. What will happen, when this goes on? We all grow old; then, we look up and notice we have a few years or none left, and we have not even matured as an individual. We are neither happy nor kind to ourself. Others have moved on well ahead of us. It's time, we start moving on NOW before it is too late.

Know yourself, know your enemy, find your friend.

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