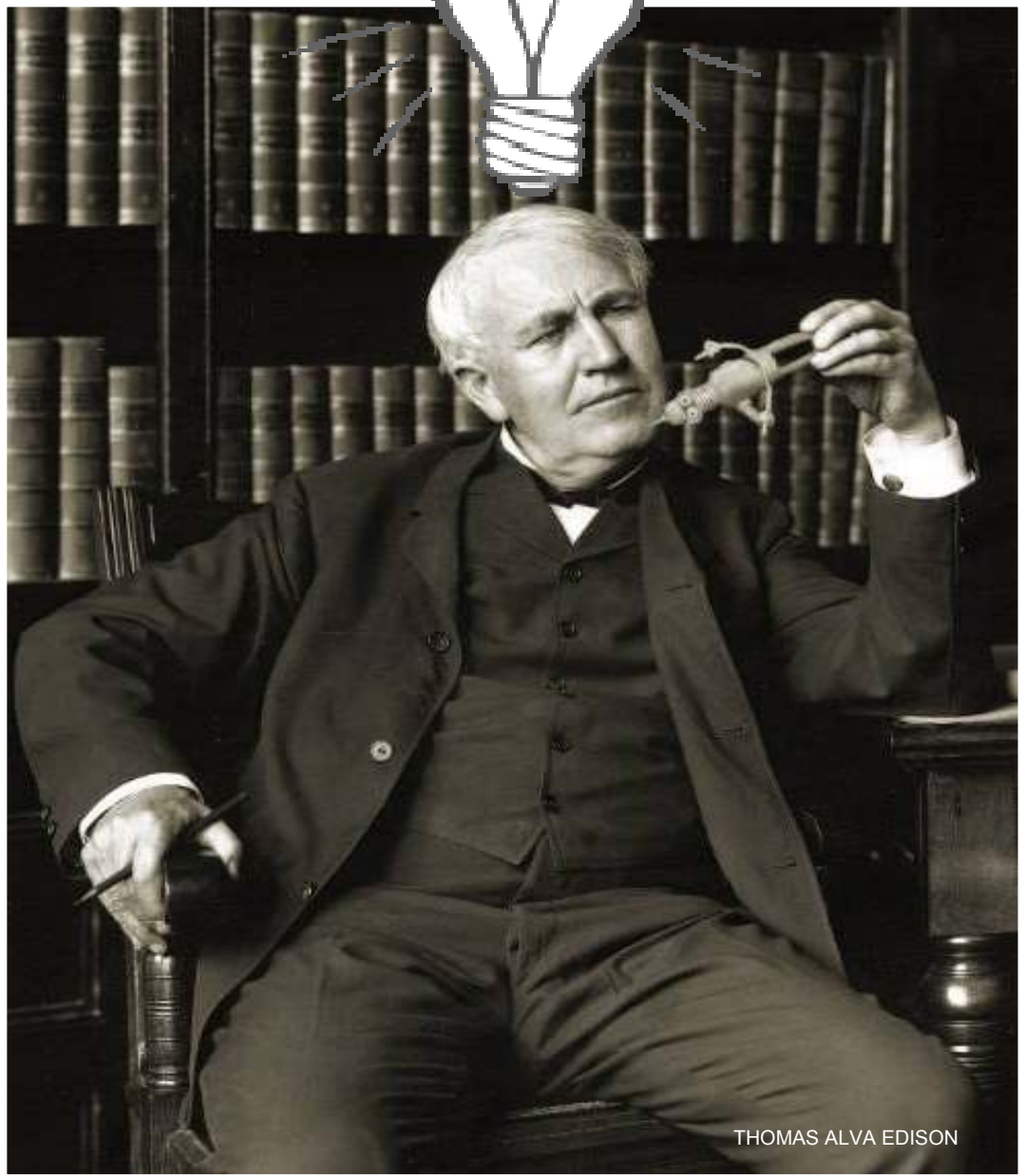


# JUST A THOUGHT



THOMAS ALVA EDISON



JUST A THOUGHT ♦ *By Abhinayana*



*Abhinayana*

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2,000 Copies.

The Cover-picture is of  
Thomas Alva Edison,  
who brought Light to  
the Whole World.

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## DEDICATION

Since we do not live alone, by and for ourselves, but depend upon so many others just that we may go on living as we do, the number of people who help us all the time is simply incalculable.

This book, therefore, is dedicated not to just a few, but to anyone who might read it. May they get as much out of it as I did in putting it together.

A diamond is a diamond no matter where it's found.



## **INTRODUCTION**

Several years ago, I began to send out a daily message, called *Just A Thought*, and did so for several years. These were usually quotations from someone, with a comment by myself, and now and then, something of my own ponderings. I discontinued these when the feedback didn't warrant going on (it was often an effort to come up with something to say anyway), but since then, I thought that, combined, they might make quite a good book (the number of such books indicates quite a demand), and, upon the promptings of others, I settled down to work on it.

Unwilling and unable to face the onerous task of overseeing the printing of it, I turned it over to the broad shoulders of Goh Hock Guan ~ aka *Dharmavira* ~ my long-known

Dharma-friend of Malacca, confident that he'll be able to get it done; he has many contacts.

I chose the cover-picture because the inventor of the electric-light bulb ~ Thomas Alva Edison ~ brought light to the whole world. What an impact he had! He is one of my heroes.

We owe so much to so many, and in our turn, should ask ourselves, *What can I give, what can I do, what can I put back?*

Like my previous books, this has been printed for free distribution, but when someone pointed out to me recently that some of my books were being offered for sale on the Internet, I had to laugh, thinking that if people are prepared to buy them, there would be a greater chance they would read them than if they got them for free; there's a 'can't-be-much-good-if-it's-free' syndrome ~ like things in boxes

of cornflakes ~ which is often true, but not *a/ways*. It has long been a Buddhist tradition to print books for free distribution, the idea being that a price cannot be put on things that are potentially so useful. I have, myself, benefited so much from books on Dharma, and so know that the old saying, “The Dharma-gift excels all other gifts” is true.



Adelaide, December 2007.



## RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

“One would suppose that the battle for religious liberty was won in the United States two hundred years ago. However, in the time since then, and right now, powerful voices are always raised in favor of bigotry and thought-control. It is useful, then, to have a compendium of the thoughts of great men and women of all faiths (and of none) on the subject, to convince us that we men and women of freedom are not and never have been alone.”

~ Isaac Asimov, Russian-born American  
scientist and writer, 1920 - 1992 ~

This sums up concisely the reason for this book. I have seen, at first-hand, the well-organized and financed ~ *and* successful ~ efforts to spread superstitious beliefs. Why *should* I ~ how *can* I ~ keep quiet?



## SEARCHING AND FINDING

"When someone is searching," said Siddhartha, "then it might easily happen that the only thing his eyes see is that what he searches for, that he is unable to find anything, to let anything enter his mind, because he always thinks of nothing but the object of his search, because he has a goal, because he is obsessed by the goal. Searching means: having a goal. But finding means: being free, being open, having no goal. You, oh venerable one, are perhaps indeed a searcher, because, striving for your goal, there are many things you don't see, which are directly in front of your eyes."

~ Extract from Herman Hesse's prize-winning novel, "Siddhartha" ~





## REINCARNATION'S TRANSFORMING EFFECT

The concept of reincarnation should have a transforming effect on those who seriously consider it. It should bring about an opening of the mind, a deeper understanding of what it means to be human. By this concept, racism and nationalistic pride are seen to have no basis because, if it is true that we have lived many times before this present life, it is probable that we've been members of various races and nations. There is therefore no reason to egoistically consider superior the race or nation that we now 'belong' to, as we did not choose to be born where we were born, and neither are we going to stay here forever, but will pass on to something else. Our race is the *human* race; we should learn to feel good about being human.



## **FIRM FOUNDATIONS**

“Ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death.”

~ *Albert Einstein: “Religion and Science”* ~

If we could get as near to the present as possible, and do what is right simply because we know it's right, organized religion would have to take a back seat. It gains from keeping people ignorant.



## FROM FAILURE, SUCCESS

“I have not failed;  
I've just found 10,000 ways  
that won't work.”

said Thomas Edison to a  
friend who remarked  
upon his failures to make  
an electric light-bulb.

Everything we have made on our long  
journey down the ages began with a  
thought; from wonderful things of benefit,  
to weapons of mass-destruction.



## **NOT PROOF ENOUGH**

“Do not consider a thing as proof because you find it written in books, for just as a liar will deceive with his tongue, he will not be deterred from doing the same with his pen. They are utter fools who accept a thing as convincing truth simply because it is in writing.”

~ Moses Maimonides, Jewish philosopher of the 12th century ~

So many of us naively assume that just because a thing is found in a book regarded as sacred it must automatically be true; we do not assume the same about recent books, whose authors might still be around to be questioned, and moreover, are seen as humans just like us. If we would read objectively, with open minds, instead of with minds already made up, we would surely see that many things in the old books are obviously and glaringly incorrect.



## HERE ALREADY

A fish once went to the King Fish and said: I have always heard about the Sea, but what is this Sea, and where is it? The King Fish replied: You live, move and have your being in the Sea. The Sea is within you and without you; you are made of Sea and you will end in Sea. The Sea surrounds you as your whole being.

*~ Zen Parable ~*

Sad, isn't it? How we always wait for someone else to point out to us what is right in front of us?



## A SLOW PROCESS

Enlightenment is like the moment of death: when it comes, it is always instantaneous, but the process leading up to it is gradual; in fact, we spend our entire lives building up to it ~ no, more: the moment we are born, we begin to die, for death is not something separate from life, but part of it; it might even be said that living is dying ~ the wheel turns, and the life-force runs out.

And enlightenment? ~ our ideas about it keep us from seeing it.



## **WITHIN OURSELVES**

“No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half-asleep in the dawning of your knowledge. The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind”.

~ Kahlil Gibran: *The Prophet* ~



## NOT OUTSIDE

“Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers, but to be fearless in facing them.

Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain,  
but for the heart to conquer it.

Let me not crave in anxious fear to be saved, but hope for the patience to win my  
freedom.”

~ Rabindranath Tagore, Indian Poet and  
Philosopher ~





## **BETTER TO DOUBT THAN BELIEVE**

"The first key to wisdom is assiduous and frequent questioning ... For by doubting, we come to inquiry, and by inquiry, we arrive at the truth."

~ Pierre Abelard, French philosopher,  
1079-1142 ~

And here's a doubt: Maybe there *is* no such thing as 'truth' somewhere 'out there'; maybe it's just a figment of our imagination. Maybe we must come to see the truth *about* things, not apart from things.



## **RISKING FREEDOM**

“To laugh is to risk appearing a fool.  
To weep is to risk being called sentimental. To reach out to another is to risk involvement. To expose feelings is to risk showing your true self. To place your ideas and dreams before others is to risk being called naïve. To love is to risk not being loved in return. To live is to risk dying. To hope is to risk despair; to try is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken, because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.

The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing, and becomes nothing. He may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he simply cannot learn and feel and change and grow and love and live. Chained by his certitudes, he is a slave, and has forfeited his freedom.

Only the person who risks is truly free.”

~ Leo Buscaglia ~



## NO-MAD-NESS

"If we want world peace, we must let go of our attachments and truly live like nomads. That's where I no mad at you, you no mad at me. That way, there'll surely be nomadness on the planet. Peace begins with each of us. A little peace here, a little peace there; pretty soon all the peaces will fit together to make one big peace everywhere."

~ Swami Beyondananda ~



## **SEE WHAT YOU'VE GOT**

Many of us wish we could fly, like *Superman*, but while wishing for things beyond our reach, we often overlook, ignore, or forget about what is already here. Do we know, for example, how we walk, or how we see? We should cultivate a sense of wonder, or rediscover it; it has been woefully neglected in our education ~ deliberately left out, it seems, or educated out of us. Should we not take joy in being human, instead of wishing to be otherwise? Consider this life as all we have; *it is!* Discover life *before* death instead of *after* it!



## RELATIVITY

“When you are courting a nice girl, an hour seems like a second.

When you sit on a red-hot cinder, a second seems like an hour.

That’s relativity”.

~ Albert Einstein ~

How long a minute is depends upon which side of the bathroom door you are!



## HUMAN-NATURE

“When one thinks of the vast folly displayed in human history, it is easy to despise human nature; but when one thinks of the many individuals who, with little money, little education, little ability, nevertheless put up a brave front and meet the day’s work with uncomplaining serenity, human nature seems sublime”.

~ William Lyon Phelps ~



## BOOKS

“The book has been man’s greatest triumph. Seated in my library, I live in a time-machine. In an instant I can be transmitted to any era, any part of the world, even to outer space.

“I have lived in every period of history. I have listened to the Buddha speak, marched with Alexander, sailed with the Vikings, ridden in canoes with Polynesians. I have been at the courts of Queen Elizabeth and Louis XIV; I have been a friend to Captain Nemo and have sailed with Captain Bligh on the *Bounty*. I have walked in the agora with Socrates and Plato, and listened to Jesus deliver the Sermon on the Mount.

“Best of all, I can do it all again, at any time. The books are there. I have only to reach up and take them down to relive the moments I have loved.”

~ Louis L’Amour: *The Sackett Companion* ~



## CONFORMITY

“He who joyfully marches in rank and file has already earned my contempt. He has been given a large brain by mistake, since for him the spinal cord would suffice.”

~ Albert Einstein ~

Truly, we demonstrate our capacity to live without using our brains by the amazing beliefs that we subscribe to!





## HOW ABOUT YOU?

None of us really wants to be as we are. We are dissatisfied, and this is how it should be, otherwise we would stagnate.

There are many things I don't like about myself and would change right now if I could.

And how is it with you?

Are you any different?



## THE UNEXPECTED

Have you noticed how anticipation of something nice is often more pleasant than the actual thing when we get it ~ that, in fact, getting it is sometimes a bit of a let-down? This is why getting something nice when it is not expected is so much nicer than when it is. It is also one of the reasons why desire causes suffering.



**SEEING**

"We do not see things as *they* are,  
we see them as *we* are."

~ Anais Nin ~

Conditioning is something we've only just begun to understand, because, in terms of evolution, a few years isn't very long at all.

As far as most of us are concerned, however, the concept of conditioning ~ let alone the understanding of it, and the transforming effect it might have ~ is still very far off.



## **FOLLOW YOUR HEART**

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”

~ Henry David Thoreau ~

Alas, such advice is only for the fortunate few. Most people live in societies where it is dangerous to do this, where undifferentiated conformity is encouraged and any deviation from the norm is frowned upon. We don't need to think back as far as China's disastrous Cultural Revolution for an example of state repression; it's always going on somewhere.



## OPPORTUNITIES

"When one door closes, another opens.  
But we often look so regretfully upon the  
closed door that we don't see the one that  
has opened for us."

~ Alexander Graham Bell ~

Unable or unwilling to see that everything  
changes constantly, we cling on to what  
we think we've got, and it prevents us  
from seeing what we really have. We  
might not always have what we want ~ we  
never do, in fact ~ but it's amazing to see  
what we have, even so.



## **INTERCONNECTEDNESS**

"Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it.

Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together.

All things connect."

~ Chief Seattle, American Indian ~

We have certainly changed the earth since we appeared on it some millions of years ago, but as Earth reminds us now and then in the form of tsunamis, earthquakes, hurricanes, and so on, we are not as much in control as we like to think, and our collective false sense of security is being shaken now as seldom before. Hold on; we're in for a rough ride!



## SELF-RELIANCE

“By ourselves is evil done,  
By ourselves we pain endure;  
By ourselves we cease from wrong,  
By ourselves become we pure.  
No-one saves us but ourselves,  
No-one can and no-one may;  
We ourselves must walk the Path,  
Buddhas only show the Way.”

Give up your begging and groveling; stop whining and complaining; get up off the floor, stand upright, and try to accept life as it is: a precarious business out of which no-one gets out alive. Knowing this, show your gratitude by leaving something positive behind when you go.



## **ALWAYS TOGETHER**

In the black, there is some white,  
In the wrong, there is some right,  
In the dark, there is some light,  
In the blind, there is some sight.

We could equally as well talk about the black in the white, as it is there, too, but this wouldn't help us much, as we tend to focus on the negative as it is, while ignoring the positive. Certainly, we all have negative qualities ~ not because we want them or like them, but because they are part of our psychic make-up and have been for a long time. At the same time, however, we have many positive qualities, which we should try to understand and appreciate, so that they may increase and flourish and eventually crowd out the negatives.





## ANIMAL-RIGHTS

"Until we stop harming all other living beings, we are still savages."

*~ Thomas Jefferson, 3rd U.S. President ~*

"I am in favor of animal rights as well as human rights. That is the way of a whole human being."

*~ Abraham Lincoln, 16th U.S. President ~*

Just because they cannot speak and say, "Stop! It hurts!" we feel that we can do what we like with animals. Suppose, however, that we were in their places: would we like to be treated as we treat them? Why are we so insensitive?



## FEEL WHAT THEY FEEL

"I have from an early age abjured the use of meat, and the time will come when men such as I look upon the murder of animals as they now look upon the murder of men."

~ Leonardo da Vinci ~

Artists are known for their greater sensitivity; through their art, music, poetry, dance, etc., their task is to attempt to convey things to people with lesser degrees of sensitivity, so that slowly ~ imperceptibly, perhaps ~ our consciousness is raised. Years ago, vegetarians were regarded as somewhat odd, but that is no longer so. Even some Thai and Tibetan monks are now becoming vegetarian.



## RIGHT MOTIVE

Do good, not for what you might get as a result, but because you have the opportunity and capacity, and because you love life.

Motive is so important. Did not the Buddha say, “*Cetanam bhikkhave kamman vadami*” (“Intention, O monks, I declare to be karma”)? Are you so sure about heaven that you will do anything to get there? Don’t delude yourself; deeds that cause pain and suffering will never lead to blessings.



## **PROLIFIC PRODUCTION**

Strange, isn't it? ~ even with our immense knowledge, science and technology, we cannot create such a thing as an ant or a blade of grass ~ not that we'd want to ~ but for thousands of years we have produced gods by the truck-load!

We are proud ~ and not unreasonably ~ about the good things we have created ~ but the things that sprang from our ignorance and fear continue to plague us, and should be confronted as soon as possible.



## **WITHHOLD JUDGEMENT**

“What are the results of a person’s past life? We can never know them by thinking or guessing and so we should not speculate about them. To try to find out is to bring distress and distraction. Do not set yourself up as a judge of others or make assumptions about their motives. You can destroy yourself by holding judgements about others.”

~ Gotama Buddha, in the *Anguttara Nikaya* ~

Religious scriptures are often like a double-edged sword, which we must be very careful about using.



## **ARISING AND PASSING AWAY**

In meditation,  
let your thoughts come and go,  
like birds that fly through the sky,  
leaving no trace .....

The purpose of meditation ~ if there must  
be a purpose ~ is not to stop thinking,  
because how could we do that anyway? ~  
but simply to observe the process of  
arising and passing away of things, so  
that we come to have an intuitive grasp of  
the fundamental law of change, and learn  
to let go of things, including meditation.



## NON-REALIZATION

An Indian found an eagle's egg and put it into the nest of a prairie chicken. The eaglet hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them.

All its life, the changeling eagle, thinking it was a prairie chicken, did what the other chickens did. It scratched in the dirt for seeds and insects. It clucked and cackled; it flew in a brief thrashing of wings and flurry of feathers no more than a few feet off the ground, because that's how prairie chickens were supposed to fly.

Years passed, and the changeling eagle grew very old. One day, it saw a magnificent bird far above in the cloudless sky, hanging with graceful majesty on the powerful wind currents, it soared with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings. "What a beautiful bird!" said the changeling eagle to its neighbor. "What is it?"

"That's an eagle ~ the chief of the birds," the neighbor clucked. "But don't give it a second thought. You could never be like him." So the changeling eagle never gave it another thought. And it died thinking it was a prairie chicken.



## CHOICES

“Two men looked out from prison bars;  
One saw mud, the other saw stars.”

Although we often don't see them, we always have choices. Sometimes, we choose sadness over happiness, sorrow over joy, hell over heaven. We torture ourselves over an imaginary afterlife, as if the suffering of this life is not enough. As ~ *if* ~ we increase in wisdom, we will learn to choose more carefully. And if we do not increase in wisdom, for what will have been all our suffering?





## UNDERSTANDING

Understanding isn't something we do,  
but rather something that happens.  
"Oh, yes, I understand," we might say.

Regarding this, there are four kinds of  
people:

The first understands quickly and doesn't  
need much teaching.

The second understands slowly, and  
requires a lot of instruction.

The third understands nothing, no matter  
what.

The fourth misunderstands.

And it is better to understand nothing at all  
than to misunderstand.



## WINDING WAY

Life is like a river:

Straight, it seldom flows,  
But twists and turns and winds about,  
As on and on it goes.

Expect life to be easy, and you will often  
be disappointed. Expect it to be difficult,  
and you will sometimes be pleasantly  
surprised. Expect it to be as it is, with its  
ups and downs, and you may find the  
strength to deal with it.



## NO END

“Here is a test to find out if your mission  
on Earth is finished:  
If you’re alive, it isn’t!”

~ Richard Bach: *“Illusions, or The Adventures  
of a Reluctant Messiah”* ~

*Is there a mission? Who sets it for us  
unless it is ourselves? And can we ever  
fulfill the mission we’ve set, when we  
continually learn new things about  
ourselves, discovering more of our  
potential, to which there might be no end?*

Some years ago, I met a Nepalese  
Christian who had been a Hindu. I asked  
him why he’d converted, and he replied,  
“Because I’m a sinner, and I need a  
savior”. I then asked if he saw anything  
positive about being human, and after  
some moments, he said, “Well, no, not  
really”. He’d been robbed and  
emasculated!



## THIS VERSUS THAT

"Think of the fierce energy concentrated in an acorn! You bury it in the ground, and it explodes into an oak! Bury a sheep, and nothing happens but decay."

~ George Bernard Shaw ~

An excuse offered for eating meat is that, without it, we won't get enough nourishment and will be weak. Look around you: Herbivores like elephants, cows, horses, rhinos and buffaloes aren't weak, are they? If you want to eat meat, be honest about it and eat it; continue turning the killing-wheel, without making excuses.



## SERVICE

“There is no such thing as sacrifice; there is only opportunity to serve.”

~ Talbot Mundy: *OM* ~

And what can we give that we have not first received? Countless people serve us every day, even if we are not aware of it and don't know them; how could we live without the people behind the scenes? We really must try to put something back, otherwise, we may reach a point where the soil becomes barren and unproductive. It is in giving, too, that we discover ourselves, and find that we are far richer than we hitherto thought.



## HERE AND NOW

“Most of us lead far more meaningful lives than we know. Often, finding meaning is not about doing things differently; it is about seeing familiar things in new ways. When we find new eyes, the unsuspected blessing in work we have done for many years may take us completely by surprise.

We can see life in many ways: with the eye, with the mind, with the intuition. But perhaps it is only by those who speak the language of meaning, who have remembered how to see with the heart, that life is ever deeply known or served.”

~ Anonymous ~



**FOR THE SAKE OF THE ANIMALS**

“Nothing will benefit human health and increase the chances for survival of life on Earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet.”

~ Albert Einstein ~

“Until he extends the circle of compassion to all living things, man will not himself find peace.”

~ Albert Schweitzer ~

Don't wait for it to happen in the world around you, blaming others for the trouble in the world ~ accept responsibility, start with yourself and do something first.



## DOESN'T HAVE TO BE NICE

If we make it a condition that everything we experience should be nice and that we should like it, we will suffer so much.

A thing doesn't *have* to be nice and we don't *have* to like it; it can still be good.

From where do we get our idea about fairness, complaining and saying "It's not fair!" Whoever said things must be fair, just to suit us?





## IDOL-WORSHIP?

We must admit that *some* people worship Buddha-images, just as some people worship meteorites, but if we understand the *purpose* of the images, we see them as reminders of someone who long ago taught a good way of life that leads to enlightenment. The images are thus very useful, and we cannot be called 'idol-worshippers.'



## SPACE-TRAVEL

We are all Space-travelers. Science tells us our Earth rotates at 1,670 kms per hour, and orbits the Sun at 18.55 miles per second. Besides this, Earth, along with the entire Solar System moves around the center of the Milky Way Galaxy. The Sun and Solar System are about 26,000 light years from the center of the galaxy. Our galaxy's stars are not stationary, but are constantly circling the center. Some near the very center may be consumed by a black hole. Our Sun is not affected by this black hole because of its enormous distance from the center. It takes our Sun 225 million years to make one trip around the galaxy.



## EXTERNAL SHOW

When the Great Tao is forgotten, kindness and morality arise. When wisdom and intelligence are born, the great pretence begins. When there is no peace within the family, filial piety and devotion arise. When the country is confused and in chaos, loyal ministers appear.

~ Chapter 18 of *The Tao Te Ching*,  
translated from the Chinese by  
Gia Fu-Feng and Jane English ~

Organized religion has degenerated ~ or  
*developed* ~ into observance of mere  
name-and-form; the meaning has long  
since been forgotten.



## **ESSENCE RATHER THAN FORM**

“Give up sainthood, renounce wisdom, and it will be a hundred times better for everyone. Give up kindness, renounce morality, and men will rediscover filial piety and love. Give up ingenuity, renounce profit, and bandits and thieves will disappear.

“These three are outward forms alone; they are not sufficient in themselves. It is more important to see the simplicity, to realize one’s true nature, to cast off selfishness, and temper desire.”

~ Chapter 19 of The *Tao Te Ching*,  
translated from the Chinese  
by Gia Fu-Feng and Jane English ~

The essence is to be discovered by those  
who dare to break away and think for  
themselves.



## DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

"The wise student hears of the Tao and practices it diligently. The average student hears of the Tao and gives it thought now and again. The foolish student hears of the Tao and laughs aloud. If there were no laughter, the Tao would not be what it is."

~ Chapter 41 of The *Tao Te Ching*, translated from the Chinese by Gia Fu-Feng and Jane English ~

Of course, we will see it according to our predilections, like the children who came upon a spider-web in the garden. The first was concerned about where the spider might be; the second wondered at its marvelous structure; the third said, "Oh, look! A trampoline!"



## DARK AGES

“An age is not called dark because there is no light, but because people refuse to see it.”

~ James A. Michener, “*Space*”~

After the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Europe fell under the power of the Church, which plunged it into a period known as ‘The Dark Ages’, lasting a thousand years, and during which few people, apart from the monks in their monasteries, could read and write. This ended only with the beginning of the *Renaissance* in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the knowledge, science, philosophy, astronomy and medical-lore of the ancient Greeks and Romans ~ in short, the spirit of rational inquiry ~ began to trickle back in.



## ALL INVOLVED

Because of the interconnectedness of things, even the most fastidious vegetarian has blood on his/her hands, but this doesn't mean we should give up trying to decrease the suffering we inevitably cause as we pass through this world; it is not a matter of all or nothing!

The movie, "*Babe*" of a few years ago, had such an impact that many young children decided to give up eating meat as a protest against the slaughter of animals.



### **REGARDING TSUNAMIS, ETC.**

"What presumptuous egocentricity to believe that earth-shaking events, at the scale at which a god (or a tectonic plate) might operate, must always have a human connection. Why should a divine being, with creation and eternity on his mind, care a fig for petty human malefactions? We humans give ourselves such airs, even aggrandizing our poky little 'sins' to the level of cosmic significance!

"When I interviewed for television the Reverend Michael Bray, a prominent anti-abortion activist, I asked him why evangelical Christians were so obsessed with private sexual inclinations such as homosexuality, which didn't interfere with anyone else's life. His reply invoked something like self-defense. Innocent citizens are at risk of becoming collateral damage when God chooses to strike a

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city with a natural disaster because it houses sinners. In 2005, the fine city of New Orleans was catastrophically flooded in the aftermath of a hurricane, Katrina.

The Reverend Pat Robertson, one of America's best-known televangelists and a former presidential candidate, was reported as blaming the hurricane on a lesbian comedian who happened to live in New Orleans. You'd think an omnipotent God would adopt a slightly more targeted approach to zapping sinners: a judicious heart-attack, perhaps, rather than the wholesale destruction of an entire city just because it happened to be the domicile of one lesbian comedian."

~ Extract from "*The God Delusion*", by British atheist Professor Richard Dawkins ~



## **KNOWLEDGE VERSUS FAITH**

Ananda said to the Buddha: *"I think there has never been a teacher as great as you, nor will there ever be one as great in the future."*

The Buddha asked: "Have you known all the Awakened Ones, the Buddhas of the past?"

*"No, Honored One."*

"And are you able to know all the Buddhas of the future?"

*"No, Honored One."*

"Then I suppose you do know this Awakened One's mind completely?"

*"No, Honored One, I do not even know your mind completely."*

"Then how can you make such a bold statement? It is better to talk of what you know than to speculate foolishly."

~ From the *Majjhima Nikaya* of  
the Buddhist Scriptures ~



## PUTTING SELF ASIDE

"The true teacher defends his pupils against his own personal influence.

He inspires self-trust. He guides their eyes from himself to the Spirit that quickens him. He will have no disciples, but his message will."

~ Amos Bronson Alcott ~

Indeed, if he does not help you to understand that anyone and anything is your teacher if you know how to learn, but instead, inculcates dependence in you upon him, he is not a teacher but a cheater!



## NOT THERE

After the never-to-be-forgotten 9/11, we  
saw empty churches filling up.

Thinking to find God in a building, and  
driven by pain, fear, hope and desire,  
self-interest impels people to embrace  
religion. Therein, finding some solace  
and explanation ~ even though it is  
primitive, in most cases ~ they relax  
and sink back into the mud of complacency,  
not knowing why they call themselves  
'Christians,' 'Buddhists,' 'Hindus,'  
'Muslims,' and so on, and never go  
deeper than the name-and-form.



## DEPEND UPON YOURSELVES

Some of the Buddha's last advice ~  
to be islands unto ourselves, lamps  
unto ourselves, and a refuge unto  
ourselves ~ is as valuable now as  
when it was 25 centuries ago. We  
must come back to ourselves  
instead of depending so much upon  
others, and, through understanding,  
develop a sense of self-reliance and  
responsibility.



## **FIRM FOUNDATION**

The only true foundation for religion is to see clearly how things are and to build on that. This means seeing that we depend, vitally, upon so many other people and things around us, and cannot live in any other way. From this comes a sense of gratitude, which, in turn, gives rise to other things. We need no belief, no complicated philosophy, no savior, nor anyone to tell us what to do or lead the way.



## **IGNORANCE IS THE CAUSE**

The present danger from the terrorist menace stems from religion gone astray, and the wrong ideas thereof must sooner or later be confronted and exposed, as they are the real cause of the trouble, just as the Buddha said so long ago. Ignorance is the real enemy of mankind and always has been. But who wants to be ignorant? It is a sickness that we are usually unaware of and turn away from and pretend it doesn't exist.



## THE CRUTCH OF RELIGION

Organized religion is a crutch that is useful only if we cannot walk unaided, but which becomes an impediment after that. This 'crutch,' even so, must be understood as such rather than just followed blindly, because, like anything, it can be misused and often is. The Muslim concept of '*Jihad*' or 'Holy War,' is an example of this; it really means an inner struggle against Ignorance, not hatred, violence, killing and war.





## FALSE DIVISIONS

You wish for liberation or enlightenment? Well, it is yours for the taking. Just see through the illusion of the wrong ideas we have inherited from the past. Most religions divide humanity into the 'saved' and the 'not-saved', the 'believers' and the 'non-believers.' Judaism speaks of non-Jews as '*Gentiles*,' Islam terms non-Muslims '*kafirs*' or 'infidels,' Christianity defines non-Christians as destined for hell. Religion, and even the names thereof, divide people, and such division is productive of great trouble. Clearly, religion, in this way, has been, and continues to be, detrimental to the world. Why should we go on living with such arbitrary divisions, when we can see the sorrow they cause?



## UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Eastern religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, *real* Taoism and Confucianism (if those latter two may be considered religions at all) are much broader than their Middle-Eastern counterparts (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), and do not divide humanity like they, although the names still do. Buddhism, for example, claims that everyone, and not just those who call themselves 'Buddhist,' has 'Buddha-nature' and can become enlightened; it doesn't say you have to be a Buddhist for this, and that if you are not, you will not be saved and go to hell. We must go deeper than the exterior aspect of Buddhism, however, deeper than its religious façade, and realize the Dharma within; it is that which helps us see beyond divisions to our essential unity.



## **PUSHING BACK THE BARRIERS**

"A human being is part of a whole, called by us the 'Universe,' a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest ~ a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

~ Albert Einstein ~



## EMPTINESS

"Nothing has any inherent existence of its own when you really look at it, and this absence of independent existence is what we call 'emptiness.' Think of a tree. When you think of a tree, you tend to think of it as a distinctly-defined object, and on a certain level, it is. But when you look more closely at the tree, you will see that ultimately it has no independent existence.

"When you contemplate it, you will find that it dissolves into an extremely subtle net of relationships that stretches across the universe. The rain that falls on its leaves, the wind that sways it, the soil that

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nourishes and sustains it, all the  
seasons and the weather,  
moonlight and starlight and sunlight  
~ all form part of this tree.

“As you begin to think more and  
more about the tree, you will  
discover that everything in the  
universe helps to make the tree  
what it is; that it cannot at any  
moment be isolated from anything  
else; and that at every moment its  
nature is subtly changing. This is  
what we mean when we say things  
are empty, that they have no  
independent existence.”

~ Sogyal Rinpoche: *"Glimpse After  
Glimpse"* ~



## **FROM THE PAST**

It is easy to see that we have benefited immensely from the past, for this is where almost all we have and are came from. We should understand and appreciate this, to counteract the tendency to become proud and think we have achieved things by our own efforts; in reality, we do nothing by ourselves; whatever we achieve and accomplish we do only because of the help and support of countless other people and things. Contemplating this brings us down to earth and permits us to go forward with humility.

Good things in abundance, however, are not all we get from the

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past; it is from the past, too, that our ignorance, prejudice, conditioning, beliefs, misunderstanding and superstition come. Most of us are unaware of this, just as the fish is unaware of the water it swims in.

These are things we have not chosen or want, but have become ours by default. We are not responsible, to praise or blame for the situation we find ourselves in; no-one is; it is just the outcome of countless causes conspiring to produce whatever comes, and only when and if we can understand this shall we be able to bring any sense of direction into our lives. The present is ours, to make of what we will; the future is not fixed.



## LIKE WAVES

“Whatever thoughts and emotions arise in meditation, allow them to arise and settle, like the waves in the ocean. Whatever you find yourself thinking, let that thought rise and settle, without any constraint. Don’t grasp at it, feed it, or indulge it, don’t cling to it, and don’t try to solidify it. Neither follow thoughts nor invite them; be like the ocean looking at its own waves, or the sky gazing down on the clouds that pass across it.

“You will soon find that thoughts are like the wind; they come and go. The secret is not to ‘think’ about the thoughts but to allow them to flow through your mind, while keeping your mind free of afterthoughts.”

~ Sogyal Rinpoche ~





## **HELP US UNFOLD**

"Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that will never be again. And what do we teach our children? We teach that two and two make four, and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are and what they can be?"

"We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you. Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move. Do you know what you can be? You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel. And when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel? You must work, we must all work, to make the world worthy of its children."

~ Pablo Casals, Spanish Cellist (1876 - 1973) ~



### THIS FROM THAT

"Before the beginning of great  
brilliance and beauty there first  
must be a period of complete  
chaos."

~ From the *I-Ching*, or *Book of Changes* ~

How else could it be? We must first know  
one in order to know the other. Strength  
comes from weakness, courage from fear,  
wisdom from ignorance, light from  
darkness, and so on.



## **A FIRMER FOUNDATION**

If we do good thinking that we will thereby escape or avoid sickness and misfortune in the future, we are laying ourselves open to disappointment. What we call 'misfortune' is part of life and cannot, with all certainty, be avoided. Not only this, but our disappointment at having failed to deflect misfortune may cause us to stop doing good, thinking that it's no use anyway. This would be a great loss. We should try to do things simply because we know they are the right things to do, and not for what we might get as a result. Such actions would be complete at the time and leave no residue.



## **OUR STRENGTH INCREASES**

"The tough thing we persist in doing eventually becomes easier to do; not that the nature of the thing itself changes, but our power to do it increases."

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson ~

We often find that life gets harder as we follow the Way, but this is not all; at the same time, we find that we grow correspondingly stronger, and able to carry not only our own burdens, but to reach out to others at times and help them with theirs.



## **WAR AND PEACE**

"War seems to part of the history of humanity. As we look at the situation of our planet in the past, countries, regions and even villages were economically independent of one another. Under those circumstances, the destruction of our enemy might have been a victory for us. There was a relevance to violence and war. However, today we are so interdependent that the concept of war has become outdated.

When we face problems or disagreements today, we have to arrive at solutions through dialogue. Dialogue is the only appropriate method. One-sided victory is no longer relevant. We must work to resolve conflicts in a spirit of reconciliation and always keep in mind the interests of others. We cannot destroy our neighbors! We cannot ignore their interests! Doing so

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would ultimately cause us to suffer.

I therefore think that the concept of violence is now unsuitable. Nonviolence is the appropriate method."

~ The Dalai Lama: "An Open Heart" ~



## IT IS WHAT IT IS

Whatever is well-said may be regarded as the word of the Buddha, whether He said it or not, because He advised us to accept truth wherever we encounter it. The Dharma is like a diamond, and a diamond is a diamond no matter where it is found; we should not hesitate to pick it up.



## JEALOUSY

"Jealousy is the jaundice of the  
soul."

~ John Dryden, English Poet, 1631 - 1700 ~

Feelings like anger, sadness or fear we may admit to, but who would ever own up to being jealous? Jealousy is a corrosive emotion, and eats at our hearts like acid. One antidote to it is to feel joy in others' happiness and fortune, even if we don't know them. *There* is happiness ready-made, and plenty of it, too. When you see someone smile, as over the innocent play of their children, the exuberant frolics of their pets, the pleasure they take over their gardens, and so on, take it as your own; they will not begrudge it to you.





## GO FOR THE GOING

"It is good to have an end to journey towards, but it is the journey that matters in the end."

~ Ursula K. Le Guin ~

Most people arrive at their destination *long* before they get there ~ indeed, even before setting out! Many things happen between departure and arrival, however, and lots of us never get there.

Go for the going, and enjoy the trip.



## NO WAY AROUND IT

"When you are deluded and full of doubt, a thousand books of scripture are not enough. When you have reached understanding, even one word is too much."

~ *Fen-Yang* ~

Does this mean that scriptures are of no use? No. They *are* useful, of course, but we must use our intelligence to differentiate what is true and what is false in them, and even then, we will reach a point when we must let go and rely upon ourselves, as the books cannot take us where we need to go. Eventually, we must leave books and words behind.



## PASSING THROUGH

"In the 19th century, a tourist from the U.S. visited the famous Polish rabbi *Hafez Hayyim*, and was astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room filled with books; the only furniture was a table and a bench. 'Rabbi, where is your furniture?' asked the tourist. 'Where is yours?' replied Hafez. 'Mine? But I'm only a visitor here.' 'So am I," said the rabbi.' "

~ Rabbinical tradition ~



## PROPHET

"A prophet once came to a city to convert its inhabitants. At first, the people listened to his sermons, but they gradually drifted away until there was not a single person to hear the prophet when he spoke.

One day, a traveler said to him, 'Why do you go on preaching?' The prophet replied, 'In the beginning, I hoped to change these people. If I still preach, it is only to prevent them from changing me.' "

~ Sufi Tale ~



## GODS

"The gods can either take away evil from the world and will not, or, being willing to do so, cannot; or they neither can nor will, or lastly, they are both able and willing. If they have the will to remove evil and cannot, then they are not omnipotent. If they can, but will not, than they are not benevolent. If they are neither able nor willing, then they are neither omnipotent nor benevolent. Lastly, if they are both able and willing to annihilate evil, how does it exist?"

~ *Epicurus*, Greek Philosopher, 342 - 270 BCE ~



## **FEELING FOR OTHERS**

“There is nothing in which people more betray their character than in what they laugh at.”

~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe ~

Strange, but true; some people find other's misfortunes funny, obviously unable to identify with them in any other way. If we learn to empathize with others and see them as ourselves, however, we would commiserate with them in their misfortunes, and feel happy at their successes, even though we might be in quite different circumstances ourselves. If, for example, we happen to be on a *downer* ourselves, but someone else is on an *upper*, at least someone is happy; like this, we share in the happiness of others, even if it's not our own. And while there is a lot of sorrow in the world around us

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which we also share, there is happiness,  
too, of which we may partake.

Think of someone you know who is happy  
right now, and enjoy that with him, without  
thinking of yourself; there is really no reason  
for us to feel as miserable as we often do.



## **NOBODY WITHOUT PROBLEMS**

“Nobody, as long as he moves about among the chaotic currents of life, is without trouble.”

~ *Carl Jung* ~

To wish for a life without problems ~ even if we could imagine it ~ is not only vain but foolish. Problems have always been good for us, stimulating us to improve things and evolve. If we had never had problems, we would still be living in caves ~ and out of necessity, rather than choice, as I have sometimes done.





## **FINER FEELINGS**

"I am conscious that meat-eating is not in accordance with the finer feelings, and I abstain from it whenever I can."

~ *Albert Schweitzer*, M.D. (1875-1965)  
German philosopher and medical missionary;  
1952 Nobel Peace Prize winner ~

During the six weeks that I was in Pakistan last year, only twice did someone try to convert me. I told one of the hopefuls that he could not expect that everyone in the world would follow his religion, and that he should learn to accept the existence of other religions, as they won't go away.

In the same way, I am not hopeful that everyone will become vegetarian (things change, but not *that* fast). The fact that most restaurants in the West now have vegetarian dishes on their menus, however, means something is happening.



### **SOME CHOICE**

"Although you may not always be able to avoid difficult situations, you can modify the extent to which you suffer by how you choose to respond to the situation."

~ The Dalai Lama:  
*The Essence of Happiness* ~

Life is not fixed and predestined for us. Although we are conditioned to act in certain ways, and often run on automatic pilot, we still have some choice, and the more we exercise this, the more we'll see we have. Have we not learned to fly? We could have remained earthbound forever! Likewise, suffering ~ being mental rather than physical ~ is often something we choose, strangely enough.



## IN US ALL

"If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evils cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

~ Alexander Solzhenitsyn,  
*The Gulag Archipelago* ~

Greed, Hatred and Delusion and all their offspring, are human qualities rather than personal ones, and must be understood as such if we are to avoid madness. Imagine, if we alone suffered from such things while everyone else around us didn't, how could we stand it? We would be made so much aware of our faults and imperfections.



## BIRTH

"Birth is difficult - whether it's childbirth, the birth of a new stage of life, or the birth of a new idea. All things alive and wonderful, while in the peak of their maturity and power, can look back on the excruciatingly painful times of new creation and early growth with great awe, wonder and, most of all, appreciation."

~ Anonymous ~

Indeed, pain accompanies growth: while growing up, we feel pain, while growing down, it's there; are we ever free of it?



## WISHFUL THINKING

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Victor Hugo wrote: -

"In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, war will be dead, the scaffold will be dead, hatred will be dead, frontier boundaries will be dead, dogmas will be dead; Man will live. He will possess something higher than all these ~ a great country, the whole earth, and a great hope, the whole heaven."

Alas, if only that dream had come true! As it was, the 20th Century was the bloodiest of them all, and the 21st doesn't bode at all well. We should not lose hope, however, but should still strive, you and I, for a better world. Many good things happen alongside the disasters; it is not a matter of unmitigated trouble.



## **LESSONS WE MUST LEARN**

Dr. Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and founder of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Non-violence, in a lecture at the University of Puerto Rico, shared the following story as an example of "non-violence in parenting":

"I was 16 years old and living with my parents at the institute my grandfather had founded 18 miles outside of Durban, South Africa, in the middle of the sugar plantations. We were deep in the country and had no neighbors, so my two sisters and I would always look forward to going to town to visit friends or go to the movies.

One day, my father asked me to drive him to town for an all-day conference, and I jumped at the chance. Since I was going to town, my mother gave me a list of groceries she needed and, since I had all day in town, my father asked me to take care of several pending chores, such as getting the car serviced. When I dropped my father off that

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morning, he said, 'I will meet you here at 5:00 p.m., and we will go home together.'

After hurriedly completing my chores, I went straight to the nearest movie theatre.

I got so engrossed in a John Wayne double-feature that I forgot the time. It was 5:30 before I remembered. By the time I ran to the garage and got the car and hurried to where my father was waiting for me, it was almost 6:00.

He anxiously asked me, 'Why were you late?' I was so ashamed of telling him I was watching a John Wayne western movie that I said, 'The car wasn't ready, so I had to wait,' not realizing that he had already called the garage. When he caught me in the lie, he said: 'There's something wrong in the way I brought you up that didn't give you the confidence to tell me the truth. In order to figure out where I went wrong with you, I'm going to walk home 18 miles and think about it.'

So, dressed in his suit and dress-shoes, he began to walk home in the dark on

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mostly unpaved, unlit roads. I couldn't leave him, so for five-and-a-half hours I drove behind him, watching my father go through this agony for a stupid lie that I uttered.

I decided then and there that I was never going to lie again. I often think about that episode and wonder, if he had punished me the way we punish our children, whether I would have learned a lesson at all. I don't think so. I would have suffered the punishment and gone on doing the same thing. But this single non-violent action was so powerful that it is still as if it happened yesterday.

That is the power of non-violence."

Now...how many of us, as parents would have thought of that? Most of us would definitely become furious, knowing that our child lied to us...and took the chance of punishing the child, without making him realize his mistakes!





## GIFTS

A gift is not just what it appears to be but contains the sentiment that inspired it. There is so much kindness and love in our lives from others; even a simple cup of tea requires care and kindness.

We should be mindful in our giving.

When we give a gift, it must be something of value to ourselves, must be something we ourselves want, otherwise it is not a gift; we throw out our garbage and things we don't want.



## WE ADD SOMETHING

How many of us boast about the achievements of our ancestors, not realizing they are theirs, not ours, even though we benefit immensely from them. We owe so much to so many, from all over the world; building upon what they left us, we strive to contribute something to the world, to be participants in the great drama of human unfolding, instead of mere spectators and recipients.



## **SELFISH HAPPINESS**

"It is because life is filled with suffering that happiness, to one who eyes are opened by frank, courageous thought, is an illusion.

For even if all the circumstances for the moment unite in a state of 'happiness,' what of one's neighbor lying ill, of one's friend's affairs, of the vast unconquered forces of illusion in one's own mind? Happiness can only exist while the rest of life is, for the moment, forgotten, and as such, is the poorest of the many goals which men have set themselves on the road of life.

Happiness in this sense, itself an infrequent product of the pursuit of pleasure, is utterly different from peace of mind, an inner serenity, an illumined joy begotten of the heart's quietude. This comes from work, a determined treading of the Middle Way to the heart's

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enlightenment, from obedience to the  
Buddha's final exhortation: 'Work out your  
own salvation with diligence.' "

~ From "THUS HAVE I HEARD",  
by Christmas Humphries ~



## **IF ONLY WE COULD FORGET!**

Ironically, the search for personal happiness is the thing that drives it away. Like the horizon which recedes as we move towards it, our efforts to find happiness never succeed.

If *only* we could forget about happiness, we would be much happier than we are!



## **LEAVE GOOD THINGS BEHIND**

"Die when I may, I want it said of me by those who knew me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow."

~ Abraham Lincoln ~

If someone could demonstrate, conclusively, that this life is all we've got, and that there is nothing after death, would it change the way we live? It shouldn't; we should still be able to live responsibly, restraining ourselves from doing things we know we shouldn't, and attempting to make the world a little bit better from our having lived in it.



## OUR BEST?

Shall we ever ~ one wonders ~ do our best? It is common to say, “I’ll do my best”, but upon looking back on things, we can usually see that we could have done better, and indeed, this is what lies behind evolution and progress; perhaps there is no end to it all. We’ve never done our best simply because we don’t know what our best is!



## HOW TO ASK

When we ask questions, we often have answers already in mind and are seeking confirmation of them. If the answer is agreeable to us, we say it is correct, but otherwise, not.

We must know how to ask, therefore, and if we ask our questions clearly, we may often find the answers therein. Only the questions should be ours, not foregone conclusions.





## ONLY THE BEGINNING

"Natural ability without education  
has more often attained to glory  
than education without natural  
ability."

~ Cicero, Roman Philosopher ~

We err if we take what is served up in  
schools for the whole of education, when  
in reality, it's only the beginning!



## **NO MUD, NO LOTUS**

"As seedlings buried in dirt, we can't actually see the dirt we're in. When we poke through the surface and start reaching for the sun, we get to clearly see the dirt we've sprung from for the first time. At first glance, in contrast with the clean fresh air and sunlight, it might appear disgusting and gross and something to get out of. The fact is that struggling through it gave us new life, and it will always feed us part of what we need to thrive ~ a reminder of where we came from, in which we remain fundamentally rooted. Rather than curse the dirt, why not reach back into it and offer our support to others as they find their way through their life's dirt and into their own sunlight."

~ Anonymous ~



**DARKNESS IS FREE**

"There will be peace with our  
Palestinian neighbors once they  
love their children more than they  
hate us."

~ Golda Meir (1898-1978) Israel's Third Prime  
Minister ~

Many Palestinians have been deliberately  
kept as refugees in Camps since 1948,  
with no attempt to resettle them  
elsewhere; the fires of hatred have been  
kept burning bright. It is very hard to put  
out these fires.

How can people who value their lives  
highly, ever defeat others who view life in  
this world lightly compared with life in their  
imaginary heaven? Darkness is always  
stronger than light; we must pay our  
electricity-bills if we want light at night;  
darkness is free!



## TO SAVE HIS LIFE

Galileo, under threat of death, was forced to confess he'd erred in saying that the Earth turns around the Sun, instead of the Sun turning around the Earth, as the Church maintained. Sometimes, we must do things we don't like or agree with, but at such times we shouldn't forget what we hold to be true. After signing his confession, Galileo is rumored to have muttered, as he turned away to house-arrest for the rest of his life: "*It still turns!*"



## **SEEK, AND YOU WON'T FIND!**

"Happiness is the absence of the  
striving for happiness."

~ Chuang-tzu - Chinese Taoist sage ~

While one teacher said: "Seek, and you will find. Ask, and you will be given. Knock, and the door will be opened to you," here is Chuang-tzu saying: "Seek, and you will *not* find." Why is this? Because happiness ~ like peace-of-mind, Truth, Heaven, Nirvana ~ is not a thing to be sought and found, but must come to us, must find us. Indeed, our search for happiness is productive of unhappiness.



### **MAKE YOUR OWN LUCK!**

"Fools wait for lucky days," said the Buddha, "but every day is a lucky day if you make it so." Every day is a time to realize Dharma.

When people talk about 'lucky days', they mean lucky for them, and that is really an interpretation of how the day really is to them. It is really self-centered to talk like this, because is their 'lucky day' lucky for everyone else?

And stars? Of course, the stars have some influence on our lives, but then, so does everything else, and the influence the stars have upon us in our daily life is so miniscule as to have no noticeable effect whatsoever. We really must step out of our egocentric way of looking at the universe, and realize that it's not out there just for us!



## DRUDGE OR ADVENTURE?

"A moment's insight is sometimes  
worth a life's experience."

~ Oliver Wendell Holmes ~

It is not the experience that counts, but  
what we learn from it. Through our  
senses, we all have countless  
experiences every day, but how much do  
we learn? Some people go through life  
seeing it as a great adventure, and  
enjoying it tremendously, while others see  
it as a drudge, unaware that there's  
anything to be learned.



## SEARCH FOR WISDOM

Let no one be slow to seek knowledge and understanding when they are young, nor be quick to tire of the search for wisdom when they grow old. For no age is too early or too late to be concerned with the health of the mind. And to say that the time for philosophy has not yet come, or that it is passed and gone, is like saying that the time for happiness is not yet come, or that it is gone for ever.

~ *Epicurus*, Greek Philosopher, 342 - 270 BCE ~





## AMBITION

"All ambitions are lawful except those that climb upward on the miseries of mankind."

~ Joseph Conrad ~

There is no reason why we should not enjoy life, and every reason why we should, inasmuch as we can, but we should do so in a legitimate way, that is, by not harming anyone or anything. Unfortunately, pleasure is often gained at the expense of others. Consider the games the Roman Emperors staged to keep the people content: unlike the Olympic games of the earlier Greeks, which involved no bloodshed, the Roman Games were spectacles of great slaughter, and the whole of North Africa was depopulated of its wild animals.



**CONNECTED TO EVERYTHING**

"We cannot live only for ourselves.  
A thousand fibers connect us with  
our fellow-men; and along those  
fibers, as sympathetic threads, our  
actions run as causes, and come  
back to us as effects."

~ Herman Melville ~



**WHO SAID IT SHOULD BE FAIR?**

"Expecting the world to be fair to you because you are a good person is like expecting the bull not to charge because you are a vegetarian."

~ Anonymous ~

Whoever dares think of himself as a good person anyway? He who does only invites suffering. Get rid of the idea that life should somehow be fair, and we'll be better able to deal with what it brings.



## QUIT COMPLAINING

"The burden becomes light which is  
cheerfully borne."

~ Ovid, Roman Philosopher ~

Yes, because it counteracts the tendency

~ so great in many of us ~ to complain

and feel sorry for ourselves, when in

actual fact, we are so fortunate.



## **DARK AND DIRTY THINGS**

Have you ever noticed that people who confide in others sometimes become cold towards them later and even begin to hate them?

Perhaps it's because they regret exposing their weaknesses and feel that they have provided their friends with a hold over them.

Far from eagerly accepting things in confidence from others, we should be cautious, lest they blow up in our faces later. A recipient of confidences and secrets becomes an accomplice in things that sometimes go awry. Secrets are dark and dirty things; if only we could be so open as to live without them!



## SLEEP ON IT

Frequently, oh, *too* frequently, we begin the day with feelings of distaste about the mistakes of yesterday, instead of seeing them as challenges. Sleep often gives us a new perspective and provides insight into the solution of our problems, and when we find the solution, we feel joy, of course, and the greater the problem solved, the greater the joy.



## SITTING IN THE SHADE

"Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago."

~ Warren Buffett ~

We owe so much to so many, most of whom we do not nor ever will know. This is what *not taking credit* means. Plant *your* tree, never minding who might sit beneath it later. Whose tree are you sitting under?



## **MORE THAN THE MESSENGER**

Occasionally, a fool may say  
something wise, and a wise man  
something foolish.

What is said should be more  
important than who says it, and  
whether it is true and useful to us or  
not; it shouldn't matter who says it.





## TO ARRIVE AT TRUTH

"Nothing is easier than self-deceit,  
for what a man wishes, that he also  
believes to be true."

~ *Demosthenes* -- Greek Orator,  
384 - 322 BCE ~

Most of us are not concerned with truth,  
but only with what we *believe* is true. Only  
when we can put aside both belief and  
disbelief (which are really the two sides of  
the same coin), will it be possible to  
understand what is true.



## PROMPT ACTION

"No sooner said than done ~  
so acts a man of worth."

~ *Quintus Ennius*,  
Roman poet and dramatist, 239 - 169 BCE ~

We all get tired of people who say they will do this or that but seldom keep their word. How refreshing, therefore, it is to meet someone who does what he says he will; it restores our flagging faith in human nature. Such a person should be regarded as our teacher and emulated, as it is surely a quality to be acquired.



## **IT MIGHT BE SWEET, BUT...**

"Oh, how sweet it is to hear one's  
own convictions from another's  
lips."

~ Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe ~

We all like to have our beliefs or opinions confirmed or supported by others, and knowing this, some people will use it to cheat or exploit us. We should take care, therefore, in our desire for confirmation, and know the difference between genuine agreement and hollow flattery. No-one should know us better than we know ourselves.



## OUTSIGHT AND INSIGHT

"Men in general judge more from appearances than from reality. All men have eyes, but few have the gift of penetration."

~ Nicolo Machiavelli,  
Italian Political Philosopher, 1469 -1527 ~

There is *outsight*, which most of us have, and *insight*, which few have, but it is by this that we really understand.



## A WIDER VIEW

"I am a citizen, not of Athens or  
Greece, but of the world."

~ Attributed to Socrates ~

More than ever before, there is a great need to think in a wider way than just nationality or race, because the world's problems are ours. TV has trivialized the horrors of terrorism and war, and they are not as far away as we prefer to think, and can happen in our own backyards, at any time. If and when they do, we would like others to think sympathetically of us, would we not?



## HOW LITTLE WE KNOW

"Education would be so much more effective if its purpose were to ensure that by the time they leave school every boy and girl should know how much they don't know, and be imbued with a lifelong desire to know it."

~ Sir William Haley ~

Widespread literacy has not brought us the benefits it should have, as many people do not follow up on their gains and waste what they have. The ability to read and write is of inestimable value for discovering more of our potential; we have not arrived at the sum-total of human endeavor. As it is, many people obviously think that their education is over once they leave school; how they can have understood so little is a mystery.



## **WERE WE EVER TOLD THIS?**

"Education is not merely a means for earning a living or an instrument for the acquisition of wealth. It is an initiation into the life of spirit, a training of the human soul in the pursuit of truth and the practice of virtue."

~ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit ~

Have we understood the purpose of education? Has it ever been explained to us? To come at it in such a way as described above, we must backtrack very far, but is there any hope of doing this? Must it take earth-shaking events to wake us up to our mistakes?



## **WE'VE BEEN DECEIVED**

"Both class and race survive education, and neither should. What *is* education, then? If it doesn't help a human being to recognize that humanity is humanity, what is it for? So you can make a bigger salary than other people?"

~ Beah Richards ~

The education-system has become what it has because we have assumed that others ~ namely, those in charge ~ know what education is all about, instead of trying to find out for ourselves; perhaps we get what we deserve, and pay the price for our thoughtlessness.





## **LESSONS IN EVERYTHING**

"What is defeat? Nothing but education, nothing but the first step to something better."

~ Wendell Phillips ~

If we won or succeeded in everything we did, we would soon become complacent and arrogant. Defeat or failure now and then is good for us; it reminds us to keep our feet on the ground and helps us to be humble (or at least, not proud); it also keeps us striving. And from whence comes success if not from failure?



## **SECTARIANISM**

Have you noticed how much acrimony there is among people of different sects of the same religion? They are even less tolerant of each other than of people of other religions, perhaps because they think there is some excuse for followers of other religions ~ who, after all, have not found what they've found ~ whereas there is no excuse for followers of their religion, who really should know better. It is all a manifestation of ego, the insidious idea of 'I, Me and Mine.'

Religion, like this, really does make people more foolish.



## **BAGGAGE**

We accumulate lots of mental baggage on our journey through life, and useless or unused knowledge becomes a burden. Knowledge is of no value unless we use it. We would be better off with far less.



## MIRACLES

"There are only two ways to live your life: One is as though nothing is a miracle, and the other is as though everything is."

~ Albert Einstein ~

Overdosed and surrounded by wonderful things we have not earned by our own efforts, we are unable to take it all in and our senses have become dull. To bring about a healthy balance, we need to discover or cultivate a sense of appreciation, joy and wonder in life; it is imperative to do so.



## THE PLAIN TRUTH

"A wise man learns more from  
his enemies than a fool from his  
friends."

~ Baltazar Gracian ~

In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, one of the characters ~ Duke Orsino ~ asks a Jester how he is, and the Jester replies, "The better for my foes and the worse for my friends."

The Duke doesn't understand, and says it must be the other way around: better off for his friends and worse off for his enemies. The Jester maintains his position, and explains that his friends flatter him and thus make a fool of him, while his enemies, in their desire to hurt him, tell the truth about him and thereby help him in his self-knowledge.



## JOY IN WORK

How many people really enjoy their work? For those who do, it ceases to be work and becomes pleasure.

For those who don't, it is long and tiring drudgery. Since most people must work, it is in their own interests to find or take at least a little joy in it; this may be done by seeing their work as serving others and making things better in some way.



## **LEARN THE RULES**

An understanding of Dharma  
may not change the  
misfortunes of life, but it  
certainly helps us to accept  
them and deal with them better.  
It is a matter of learning the  
rules.



## EVERYTHING HAS A STORY

"Nothing is interesting if you are not interested in it."

~ Helen Macinness, (whoever she is/was) ~

Everything ~ everything ~ has its story, and if we listen to it, we will find something of interest there; there is absolutely no need to complain of being bored. Moreover, if we look a little closer, we will see that everything is connected to everything else in a marvelous net-like way: pick up one knot of the net, and the whole net comes with it. See how you and I are connected now, by these magical things we call words; some of you I have never met and know almost nothing of, but the fact that you are reading this shows that you are there.





## **BEAUTY AS WE GO**

"Live your life each day as you would climb a mountain: An occasional glance toward the summit keeps the goal in mind, but many beautiful scenes are to be observed from each new vantage point. Climb slowly, steadily, enjoying each passing moment; and the view from the summit will serve as a fitting climax for the journey."

~ Harold V. Melchert ~

Mahatma Gandhi spent some years studying in London, but so single-minded was he that he appears to have noticed little of his surroundings, and wrote nothing of it later. Focusing too much on the goal prevents us from seeing what is now; thinking too much about success obscures the success along the way. It is an achievement to live each day and go to sleep healthy and well?  
*Success? Lots of it!*



## NO SUBSTITUTE FOR DIRECT EXPERIENCE

We live in times different than our ancestors of centuries ago, and have more freedom to inquire and find out; whether we take advantage of this or not is up to us; many of us don't, and continue to believe what we've been told.

If we are sincere, we must put aside belief and disbelief in the search for knowledge. Unless and until we have experienced a thing for ourselves, we will not be in a position to say of it, 'This is true', no matter if all the books in the world claim it to be so.



## **ENJOY WHAT YOU DO**

"People are going to be most creative and productive when they're doing something they're really interested in. So, having fun isn't an outrageous idea at all. It's a very sensible one."

~ John Sculley ~

Of course, we must differentiate between the right and the wrong ways of having fun: The right way avoids causing harm in any way, either to others or to oneself, while the wrong way finds fun regardless of the rights and feelings of others. There is plenty of scope for enjoying ourselves in the right way. Are we getting enough 'job-satisfaction' to keep us going without too much stress or strain? That is the question.



## WALK YOUR OWN WAY

"Each of us must make his own path through life. There are no self-help manuals, no formulas, no easy answers. The right road for one is the wrong road for another.....The journey of life is not paved in blacktop; it is not brightly lit, and it has no road signs. It is a rocky path through the wilderness."

~ M. Scott Peck, Contemporary American Inspirational Writer ~

And the wilderness is the mind. Any Path or Way prescribed by others can only serve as a general guideline. It is never a guarantee of specific results, for the simple reason that we are all different, and so each person's approach to that path will be different to some extent. No-one is in a position to say ~ as many people unfortunately still *do* say ~ that their way is the best way for everyone.

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The most a person can say is that it is the best way for him, and only when he has examined and tried other ways would they be qualified to say even this.

Really, open the mouth to say anything about the Way, and we're already off. It is not a matter of talking but of walking.



## NO DIVISIONS

"I make no distinction between the mind and the spirit, and therefore no distinction between the process of achieving spiritual growth and achieving mental growth. They are one and the same."

~ M. Scott Peck, American Inspirational Writer ~

Our habit of dividing life into parts, like a cake ~ one part for work, one part for home, a part for study, a part for relaxation, another part for meditation or our inner life, and so on, or heart, spirit and mind ~ creates problems that are not there in reality; it causes us to lead divided lives. There is no dichotomy, no separate parts, and we may experience reality anywhere at all as it is always there; the problem is, we are usually not there ~ or *here!*

Someone I once knew complained to me that although she'd been following a *path*

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for some years, she'd never had a spiritual experience. She obviously very definite ideas about what constitutes a spiritual experience, and had not seen what is always right in front of her eyes. She'd been looking, but not seeing.

We find intense beauty and wonder in comprehension, and this, after all, is what enlightenment is about: comprehension, understanding, realization, seeing things as they are, an experience of the mind, a so-called *spiritual* experience. We must enjoy and appreciate such moments.

There's the old Zen saying about the mountain: First, you see the mountain, then you don't see the mountain, and then you see the mountain. How is this? Well, first, we see the mountain like everyone sees the mountain, which is not really seeing it at all, as we simply label it a mountain and call it 'beautiful' or 'high' and so on; we never really come into contact with it; our desire to possess it by labeling

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it and then dismissing it gets in the way.

Secondly, we see the mountain by an intellectual understanding, analyze it, break it down into elements, and there, before our eyes, the mountain disappears, and we call it an illusion.

Thirdly, we see the mountain without any intellectual activity, without desire to possess, analyze or dismiss; it is just there, of the same substance and reality ~ or unreality ~ as ourselves.

I once knew a monk who refused to look at the sunset in case he felt attracted to the beauty thereof; he didn't see that he was already attached to it, whereas if he had just seen it without the idea to catch it with a label and possess it ~ which is not possible, of course ~ he could still have enjoyed it.

Is the sunset beautiful or the storm ugly? In our minds, perhaps, but not in themselves; they are just as they are.





## **TO TOUCH AND BE TOUCHED**

"Sometimes our light goes out but is blown back into flame by another human being. Each of us owes deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this light."

*~ Albert Schweitzer ~*

How many times has it happened that someone has come along when we were feeling glum and unable to see the way ahead, and picked us up and made things clear? And sometimes, we do the same thing for others. It all goes to show that we are not complete in ourselves, and that we need others.



## A MATTER OF DEGREE

"Enlightenment must come little by little, otherwise it would overwhelm."

~ Idries Shah -- Sufi Writer ~

Come on, be fair with yourself ~ can't you see an increase in enlightenment ~ that is, *understanding* ~ in your life? It is like a thermometer, with many degrees, and although we might be nearer to the freezing-point than the boiling-point, nevertheless, we are somewhat enlightened.

Sure, it is hard at times, but do you know anyone whose life isn't?



## CAPACITY FOR NONSENSE

"The curse of man, and the cause of nearly all his woe, is his stupendous capacity for believing the incredible."

~ H. L. Mencken ~

Beautiful girls waiting for us in Heaven (what do women get? Nothing's said about them, poor things!); virgin-births; resurrection from the dead; ritualistic cannibalism (trans-substantiation of bread-and-wine into flesh-and-blood); unquenchable hell-fire (no energy-crisis there); mermaids, unicorns, flying reindeer, talking animals, burning bushes; the list is endless!



## SHALL WE FOLLOW THE DINOSAURS?

"Human history becomes more a race between education and catastrophe."

~ H.G. Wells ~

More disaster is caused by our ignorance and stupidity than is caused by nature, and the irony is, we have the ability to do more about this than about things like floods, earthquakes, tidal-waves, droughts, and so on. There is no excuse for our ignorance today, as there might have been hundreds of years ago, because unlike the ignorance of our ancestors, ours is *cultivated* ignorance; we *choose* to be ignorant, and consequently, racism, nationalism, fanaticism, terrorism and war flourish, when we should have outgrown them.

Why ~ *how* ~ can this be?



## LEARN TO LET GO

"This is certain, that a man who studies revenge keeps his wounds open, which otherwise would heal and do well."

~ *Francis Bacon*, English Philosopher-Scientist,  
1561 - 1626 ~

To hold grudges, to hate and plan revenge on those who hurt us, requires great energy on our part, and in fact, burns us up like a fire ~ which is just what those who deliberately hurt us want: to see us hurting ourselves for them. There's no-one who's not been hurt, but we must go on, without thinking too much about the past. It is hard to love some people, but to hate them only hurts ourselves.

*"Hate is not overcome by hate;  
By love alone it is quelled.  
This is a truth of ancient date,  
Today still unexcelled".*

~ GOTAMA BUDDHA ~



## FORGIVENESS

"Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future."

~ Paul Boese ~

If we insist on carrying all the old burdens of resentment and anger towards people who have hurt or offended us, our lives become so cramped that we have little room to move. Forgiveness, through understanding that for everyone, life is a struggle, really frees us up.



## **GET UP OFF THE FLOOR!**

"Forgive yourself for your faults and mistakes and move on."

~ *Les Brown* ~

To castigate ourselves for our faults and mistakes and guiltily carry them with us requires holding an image of ourselves that is out of all proportion to reality. If only we would accept that, like everyone else, we are on a journey, and are imperfect, it would be much easier for ourselves. Get up off the floor!

In medieval Europe, kings and lords kept *jesters*, who were often termed *fools* though they were by no means so (these are the *Jokers* depicted in a pack of playing-cards). Such jesters had special license, and could openly criticize and make fun of the people they worked for. The rulers thus had an opportunity to see themselves through others' eyes.



## OUR RESPONSIBILITY

"If the other person injures you, you may forget it; but if you injure him, you will always remember."

~ *Kahlil Gibran* ~

We cannot make other people understand us, but it *is* within our capacity to understand them, so the responsibility is more with us than with others. If people do not always respect our rights, we must still respect theirs; life should not be a game of tit-for-tat.

On the Way, it is not that we can no longer do any wrong ~ we are not so far along ~ but that, when we do so, the conscience kicks in and bothers us, and we find it hard to live with ourselves without trying in some way to make amends. We can no longer live in a carefree, care/less way.





**ONLY THE STRONG**

"The weak can never forgive.  
Forgiveness is the attribute of the  
strong."

~ Mahatma Gandhi ~

Just as it takes courage to admit one's  
mistakes and apologize, so also, to  
forgive requires strength. The back will  
not break if we bend.



## **IT MUST COME TO YOU**

“ .....to talk of so-and-so ‘obtaining liberation’ is a misuse of terms. That which is liberated is always life, not the individual. Indeed, it is at the expense of the individual that such liberation is achieved.”

~ J. Krishnamurti, Sage, 1895 - 1986 ~

He also said,

“The immeasurable cannot be sought by thought, for thought has always a measure. The sublime is not within the structure of thought and reason, nor is it the product of emotion and sentiment. The negation of thought is attention; as the negation of thought is love. If you are seeking the highest, you will not find it; it must come to you, if you are lucky ~ and luck is the open window of your heart, not of thought.”



## HARD TO APOLOGIZE

Because of our self-image, it's hard to say sorry for something we've done that we shouldn't have done, and so our faults get compounded; it's as if we think we are beyond reproach. Be not slow to apologize, before your faults set hard, like concrete.



**LEARN FROM THEM**

"You can easily judge the character  
of a man by how  
he treats those who can do nothing  
for him."

~ James D. Miles ~

Most of us know how it feels to be ignored  
by people we have helped before, but  
who now feel they can get nothing more  
from us; it is a good reason for us not to  
behave similarly towards others.



## **IF IT'S NOT HERE, IT'S NOT THERE**

“... To talk of so-and-so ‘obtaining liberation’ is a misuse of terms. That which is liberated is always life, not the individual. Indeed, it is at the expense of the individual that such liberation is achieved.”

~ J. Krishnamurti ~

It would save us a lot of time and trouble if we paid heed to this. Many of us are motivated in our search by desire and/or fear ~ desire of getting something that someone has told us we might get if we do certain things, or fear of not getting them. Neither desire or fear are good motives, and only lead to frustration. We must know why we are doing what we are doing; don't simply follow others!

A Way always leads somewhere, from here to there, from this to that, from A to B, but there is no way to get to where you already are. We just have to realize this.



## **BLINDED BY LOVE, BLINDED BY HATE**

"Love blinds us to faults,  
but hatred blinds us to virtues."

~ Iba Ezra ~

I don't know who Iba Ezra is or was, but it doesn't matter, does it? What he said makes sense, and is worth thinking about.

It may help us to see a bit clearer whenever these powerful emotions strike.

It is too idealistic to expect anyone to love everyone, but we should be in sufficient control of our emotions to at least see something good in people we dislike. If we do not, cannot, or will not, that says more about ourselves than about others.



## SAY NOTHING

"There is one way to find out if a man is honest: ask him!  
If he says yes, you know he's crooked."

~ Groucho Marx ~

There are certain things one cannot ~ or *should* not ~ claim about oneself.  
Honesty is one, humility another, goodness one more. Don't say yes, don't say no. Just don't talk.



### WHAT IF....?

"Sometimes, I pause and sadly think of all the things that might have been, of all the golden chances I let slip by, and which never returned again. It fills me with gloom when I ponder this, until I look at the other side: how I might have been completely engulfed by misfortune's surging tide."

~ G.J. Russell ~

Although it has only two letters, *'if'* is a very big word, and the fulcrum of so many of our worries. We think, "*If* only I had done that," or "What *if* such-and-such a thing happens to me," instead of seeing what is. Many of the things we worry about and fear might happen to us never do, and in the meantime we have suffered, not content with the suffering of the present.





## **COMMUNITY SPIRIT**

"This is the true joy of life: being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one, being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clot of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it what I can."

~ George Bernard Shaw ~

When we see that we are not in any way independent, but that we live as part of something much bigger than our tiny selves, we begin to live with community spirit, and take joy in doing whatever we can for the world we live in.



## HONESTY

"Honesty is for the most part less profitable than dishonesty."

~ Plato ~

Which is undoubtedly why honesty is quite rare today. It is said that every man has his price and can be bought in one way or another. There must be some rare exceptions, but this seems to be generally true.



## **FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS**

"No man is an island, entire of itself;  
every man is a piece of the  
continent, a part of the main..... Any  
man's death diminishes me  
because I am involved in Mankind;  
and therefore never send to know  
for whom the bell tolls: it tolls for  
thee."

~ John Donne,  
English Poet and Mystic, 1572 - 1631 ~

Dharma and insight are not limited to  
those who call themselves 'Buddhists', but  
are the birthright of us all.



## DOUBT VERSUS BELIEF

"Belief gets in the way of learning."

~ Robert Heinlein -- Sci-Fi Writer ~

When we believe something, our minds  
are already made up about it, and there is  
no more room to learn.

Honest doubt is much better than belief; it  
prevents our minds from ossification.

We believe when we do not know;  
When we know, we do not believe.



## LOOKING TOO HARD

"We aim above the mark to hit the mark."

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson,  
American Philosopher/ Poet, 1803 - 1882 ~

If we are looking for something, very often that obscures what is there, and to see it, we must back off a bit. It's like looking up at the night-sky, and singling out one particular star. After a while, we can no longer see that star; our gaze has obscured it. In order to see it again, we have to shift our gaze slightly to one side, and there it is, still there.

We aim for success, but often, we do not know what success is, and our ideas of it prevent us from seeing the success we already have.



## VICTIMS OF BIRTH

Our conditioning is such that unless we begin to understand it, we will always be puppets. See how we live our lives on the basis of where we were born, and take a standpoint, thinking in terms of 'us' and 'them.' The Israelis no more chose to be born where they were than the Palestinians did, for example. Their mutual antagonism is a consequence of their birth.



## **FREEDOM TO LAUGH**

"Against the assault of laughter  
nothing can stand."

~ Mark Twain,  
American Writer and Satirist, 1835 - 1910 ~

Laughter is one of the most powerful  
weapons against ridiculous beliefs like  
martyrdom ~ that killing and dying for  
one's religion will guarantee one a ticket  
to heaven. The one who laughs, however,  
must be free from such or similar beliefs  
himself, or else he, in turn, will be  
mocked.



**SLOWLY, WE LEARN**

"A failure is a man who has  
blundered, but is not able to cash in  
on the experience."

~ Elbert Hubbard,  
American Author, 1856 - 1915 ~

I, for one -- and I know I have plenty of  
company -- learn slowly and in my own way,  
making many mistakes as I go; I am  
confident, however, that I will eventually  
reach where I want to go. And have I not  
said that, as human beings, we are  
already tremendously enlightened? The  
problem is, we don't always live by our  
enlightenment, and often forget it's there!

Nevertheless, success comes from  
failure.





## GET UP AND GO ON

Our strength, as humans, lies not so much in our achievements ~ stupendous though they are ~ but in the acknowledgment and understanding of our weaknesses and mistakes, and our refusal to be reconciled with them; we may fall down, but we get up and go on; *this* is where our strength comes from.



## YOU, NOT YOUR GURU

Someone once said to Krishnamurti:  
“When you were young you wrote a book  
in which you said: *‘These are not my  
words, they are the words of my Master.’*  
How is it that you now insist upon our  
thinking for ourselves? And who was your  
Master?”

Krishnamurti answered: “Does it matter  
very much who a Master or a guru is?  
What matters is life ~ not your guru, not a  
Master, a leader or a teacher who  
interprets life for you. It is you who have to  
understand life; it is you who are suffering  
in misery; it is you who want to know the  
meaning of death, of birth, of meditation,  
of sorrow, and nobody can tell you... What  
is important is to be a light unto yourself,  
to be your own Master and disciple, to be  
both the teacher and the pupil.”



## **SUBTERFUGE**

"The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by an endless series of hobgoblins."

~ H. L. Mencken, American Author & Critic,  
1880 - 1956 ~

If politicians were honest about their motives instead of resorting to subterfuge, if they were genuinely concerned about their people, instead of using them as 'human shields', we would have far fewer problems in the world.



## YOU ARE NOT TOO SMALL

"Anyone who thinks they are too small to make a difference has never been in bed with a mosquito buzzing around."

~ Anonymous ~

We *are* important, and we *do* make a difference; without each of us living in the world, it would not be what it is. Who have you touched today, and who have you been touched by?



## PUT SELF ASIDE

"Develop interest in life as you see it ~  
in people, things, literature, music ~  
the world is so rich, simply throbbing  
with treasures, beautiful souls and  
interesting people. Forget  
yourself."

~ Henry Miller, American Writer, 1891 - 1980 ~

Too much concern for ourselves ~ *fearful*  
concern ~ prevents us from seeing what  
is right in front of us, here and now.

Religion thrives on it!

Although we can't simply forget ourselves,  
we can, now and then, put self aside for  
greater interests, rather than always  
keeping it at the center.

This is possible.



## UNFOLDING

"Is there even one soul, however materialistic, that does not wish to unfold? There cannot be. It is in the unfoldment of the soul that the purpose of life is fulfilled."

~ Hazrat Inayat Khan, Sufi Teacher, 1882 - 1927 ~

Sufism is the mystic branch of Islam, and was/is often under suspicion by mainstream Islam because of its openness towards other religions. The Sufis were so positive about everything. Look at this quotation from Master Jalalluddin Rumi (1207 - 1273):

"Come, come again, whoever, whatever you may be, come; Heathen, fire-worshiper, sinful of idolatry, come. Come, even if you have broken your penitence a hundred times; ours is not the portal of despair and misery. Come."

Is this not a recognition of the Buddha-nature in everyone?



## THE CONTAINER AND THE CONTENTS

"When you learn to distinguish between the container and the contents, you will have attained wisdom."

~ Idries Shah, Sufi Teacher and Writer, 1924 – '96 ~

The benefits of religion are unavailable to the majority of people ~ be they Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, etc. ~ as they are content with the Container, and never bother to find out about the Contents. On this level, they are very much the same, no matter what they call themselves.



## CHANGE YOUR VIEW

We torture ourselves if we think things go wrong ~ “*Everything went wrong today*”, we commonly hear, or perhaps even say ourselves.

*Wrong?* What we mean is that things didn’t go as we wanted them to. Come on! Life doesn’t go according to our desires or wishes.

Things don’t go wrong; they *happen!* See how differently things appear if we look at them in this way!





**LOOK DEEPER**

"So many gods, so many creeds,  
So many paths that wind and wind,  
While just the art of being kind,  
Is all the sad world needs."

~ Ella Wheeler Wilcox,  
American Poet and Author, 1850 - 1919 ~

And when the Dalai Lama says:

*"My religion is kindness,"*

he takes us beyond all divisive labels to the  
real thing.



## NOT OURS AT ALL

"Our knowledge is the amassed  
thought and experience of  
innumerable minds."

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson,  
American Philosopher & Poet, 1803 - 1882 ~

It is rather humbling to realize that most of  
what we think of as *our* knowledge is not  
ours at all, that what we really know by  
our own experience is very little; indeed,  
even our language, which makes our lives  
so very rich, is not ours. We owe so much  
to so many.



## TRUTH?

"Truth is living, not static, and the mind that would discover truth must also be living, not burdened with knowledge or experience."

~ J. Krishnamurti, Sage, 1895 - 1986 ~

We think of Truth as something existing by itself ~ an entity, like a god ~ *out there*. But there is actually no such thing; rather, there is the truth *about* things ~ that is, things are as they are, instead of as we perceive them to be. To understand things as they are, however, requires insight, again and again, because insight doesn't stay with us, but comes and goes.

Sometimes, we may understand very clearly, but our clear-seeing passes, and the darkness closes in again. And yet we have seen, and never forget it.



## NO FRONTIERS

"When you see the Earth from space, you don't see any divisions of nation-states there. This may be the symbol of the new mythology to come; this is the country we will celebrate, and these are the people we are one with."

~ "The Power of Myth, by Joseph Campbell, American Writer on Mythology, 1904 - 1987 ~

We choose to live like frogs in a well, looking at the world in a narrow manner, but we can see it in a more complete way. Unfortunately, many of us seem to be unaware that we have a choice. Those who know must try to reveal it to those who don't, hard though this will be.



## WE NEED PROBLEMS

"It is a tragedy for a person not to have had difficulties to overcome in his or her childhood."

~ Alfred Adler, Austrian Psychologist,  
1870 - 1937 ~

Too much kindness becomes unkindness.

Imagine a mother loving her child so much that she cannot bear to see him fall down and cry when he tries to walk, so says to him: "Oh, don't bother even trying; I will carry you wherever you need to go."

This would be compassion without wisdom, and would not help the child at all. Pain is part of life, and we must learn how to deal with it. Difficulties help us develop fiber and resourcefulness.



## **RELIGION'S UMBRELLA**

"The religious mind is something quite different than the mind that believes in religion."

~ J. Krishnamurti - 1895 - 1986 ~

Some of the many huge portraits of Saddam Hussein in Iraq showed him in the attitude of prayer, whereby he tried to convey the impression that he was a devout Muslim, like lots of other fanatics, but he was far from being a religious person.

Religion is such a game, and it's not surprising that lots of people today look down on it as anachronistic.



## **WE ARE INVOLVED**

"As long as men massacre animals, they will kill each other. Indeed, he who sows the seeds of murder and pain cannot reap joy and love."

~ Pythagoras, Greek Mathematician,  
circa 569 - 475 BCE ~

The Law of Cause-and-Effect is not something we need to believe, but can see it, all around and within ourselves. If we wish to see less war and suffering in the world, we must start with ourselves, as we are involved in it in various ways.



## SUPERSTITION

"Superstition is born of ignorance  
and fear, and thrives the most when  
Reason is asleep."

~ Zarathustra, Founder of Zoroastrianism ~

Who will admit to being superstitious  
when it is a form of ignorance? And yet  
the religions that most people claim to  
follow are full of it, as they are the  
creations of their followers, who follow ~  
when they follow at all ~ through fear.  
Only when people live religiously, without  
fear of punishment or hope of gain, will  
religion shake off its shroud of  
superstition.





## WAKE UP!

"Superstition is based on fear and the irrational interpretation of life by the savage mind.

Be not superstitious. Believe not in omens, portents, charms, talismans, lucky and unlucky days, and numbers. The stars and planets and constellations decide not one's fate"

~ Zarathustra, Persian Founder of Zoroastrianism (commonly known as 'Fire Worship'); 6th Century BCE ~



### VICARIOUS AT-ONE-MENT

We live vicariously, you and I ~ that is, through others. Without submarines, we've been to the bottom of the ocean; without spacecraft, to the Moon. Without climbing, we've been in the Andes and the Himalayas; without leaving our homes, we've been up the Amazon and to the source of the Nile. We've traveled back in time through recorded history and the writings bequeathed to us by thousands.

And yet we complain of boredom. Why is this, unless our senses have suffered overload and burn-out?



## PROJECTIONS

"If triangles had a god,  
he would have three sides."

~ Baron de Montesquieu,  
French Philosopher and Critic,  
1689 1755 ~

We believe just what we want to believe,  
whether our beliefs are supported by facts  
or not. Our gods ~ and we have had so  
many, and no doubt will have still more ~  
are just reflections of ourselves.



## HOLIDAY/HOLY-DAY

"The secret of success is making  
your vocation your vacation."

~ Mark Twain, American Humorist,  
1835 - 1910 ~

Because we do not see the wonder of life as it passes by, we insist upon dividing it into parts ~ the ordinary and the special, the mundane and the supramundane, the physical and the mental/spiritual, etc.

When and if we can see life as an unbroken whole, then we might find that what we spend much of our waking time thinking about and looking for is not far away at all. Every day is a holiday if we know how to look at it ~ 'holy-day.'



## STRANGE VALUES

In a society where old people struggle to live, and nurses and teachers are grossly underpaid for their essential services, entertainers and sportsmen are paid obscene amounts; there is something terribly wrong and rotten here.

Why do we place such preposterous value on entertainers? Clearly, because we are bored, jaded, not at peace with ourselves, and need to be carried away to fantasy-land.



## FAREWELL TO GOD

What happens if we reject the primitive notion of the anthropomorphic God of the Bible? We are left to observe things freely. The following is an extract from *Farewell To God*, by Charles Templeton ~ a close friend and colleague of the mass-evangelist Billy Graham ~ before his doubts in what he believed became too great to control and he lost his faith; he was himself, until then, a very well-known evangelist.

"One of the first things learned by anyone who seeks an answer to the riddle of the universe is that, while chance may play a part, our lives, our world, and the universe are not governed by chance. They do appear, however, to be governed by what may best be described as laws ~ physical, moral, and spiritual laws.

"Certainly, this is true of the physical

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world. Gravity may be defined as the mutual attraction between all matter, but it is so much more than this. The law of gravity makes mobility possible. Obey the law of gravity and you are free, in normal circumstances, to move about as you will. But disobedience of the law of gravity is not an option ~ you *must* obey it or suffer the consequences."



## LONG-TERM

Learning and understanding more about life ~ not *my* life or *yours*, but simply life ~ makes living worthwhile. Otherwise, with all its pain and uncertainty, one might be tempted to give up. The mayfly lives just a few hours, during which its whole life-cycle is carried out; it can never understand things long-term, but this is how we must see things to make sense of life; we must see ourselves in context, not alone and separate.





## PURPOSE OF LIFE?

"There is only one meaning of life:  
the act of living itself."

~ Erich Fromm, German-American  
Psychologist/Philosopher, 1900 - 1980 ~

Beware of people who claim they know  
the purpose of life ~ they are pretending.  
No-one can tell us that. They might know  
the purpose of *their* life as they see it, but  
we ~ each of us ~ must find our own  
purpose. This is a lifelong task, and many  
people never succeed ~ indeed, many  
people never begin!

We will go on asking, "What is the  
purpose of Life?" until we realize we must  
give life a purpose by the way we live.

What is *your* purpose?



## INTERDEPENDENCE

"If you want to make an apple-pie from scratch, you must first create the universe."

~ Carl Sagan, American Astronomer and Science Writer, 1934 - 1996 ~

To celebrate an *Independence Day* is to celebrate an illusion. Since everything depends upon everything else, there is no such thing as independence whatsoever. Build on this to co-operate instead of to compete; it's much healthier.



## IRONICAL

In all things, we must try to see something good, and give credit where credit is due.

After the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Europe fell under the power of the Christian Church, and entered a period known as 'The Dark Ages' lasting a thousand years. It wasn't that there was no light ~ the sun shone just as brightly as before ~ but that ignorance was fostered and prevailed; it was the Darkness of Ignorance.

And, while this was going on, Islam arose, and challenged Christianity. Strangely, the whole world owes a lot to Islam for preserving the knowledge of the ancient Greeks and Romans ~ Science, Medicine, Astronomy, Mathematics, Philosophy ~ which Christianity had discarded.

The only people in Europe who could read and write during *The Dark Ages* were the

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monks in monasteries; even kings and rulers were illiterate and had to bow to the Pope in Rome, who ruled like an emperor, and had the power of life and death over all.

Islam developed a brilliant civilization in places like Spain and Sicily, apart from in the Middle-East. Europeans wanting access to the ancient knowledge had to go to Muslim universities, and were welcomed and accepted without being pressured to convert to Islam. This says a lot for the tolerance and magnanimity of Islam at that time. It's a great pity that this is no longer so.

Since I set out on my travels in 1965, I went to many Muslim countries ~ Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kuwait, Iraq, Egypt, Malaysia and Indonesia ~ and must say that I rarely felt fear among the Muslims, and was generally treated quite well. I found Muslim countries less dangerous than

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many Western countries ~ look at the U.S., for example, where it is inadvisable to go out alone on the street at night (or even in the day, in some places!) It is said that there are about 43,000 murders in *the Land of the Free, the Home of the Brave* every year.

Moreover, I experienced few attempts to convert me, whereas Christians have tried many times, some of them threatening me with eternity in hell for resisting (Americans, in particular ~ of course, this is a generalization, and we must be wary about such ~ are quite ignorant of the world beyond their shores, but to hear many Christians talk, you would think they know *all* about heaven and hell). In fact, I recall only one Muslim ~ someone I met in Istanbul some years ago ~ who hinted at me becoming Muslim. I told him I wasn't looking for another religion, but for something beyond religion; he accepted this, and we remained friends. I did not try

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to convert him to Buddhism ~ such a thing wouldn't enter my head; I only wish people to be human beings, and to understand what that means; few do.

Rooted in earlier Judaism and Christianity, and acknowledging common ancestors, Islam began in 623 in Arabia.

Its spread outwards from there was phenomenal. Burning with zeal, and using fire and sword, Muslims carried the message of Mohammed, and within a hundred years, had conquered all countries east between Arabia and India, north, as far as present-day Turkey (still under the Byzantine Empire at that time), south as far as Aden, and west across the coast of North Africa, right up through Spain, and were almost at the gates of Paris. If they had not been halted and turned back there into Spain, Europe ~ and consequently most of the world ~ would probably be Muslim now. As it is, there is religious diversity, and often friction between the various faiths.

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Clearly, religion plays a part in human life; just what, we should try to understand, so that it may help us instead of hinder and divide us, as it so often does. It's not enough to call ourselves Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, as names mean little; we must try to live by the teachings and spirit of religion.

Only when we recognize the things we have in common and that connect us will we have any real hope for peace. The Buddha spoke about the facts of birth, ageing, sickness and death as being things we all share, and from which we cannot escape. Instead of seeing unity in diversity, however, we focus on the things that divide us, and use them to cause trouble. What strange beings we are!

Sometimes, I think the only hope for humanity is to make open contact with extra-terrestrials ~ then we'll see a difference, as they'll probably be nothing at all like us!



## **THE NATURE OF SECTARIANISM**

"Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendent, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often with human blood, destroyed civilizations, and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now."

~ Part of a speech made by Swami Vivekananda, Indian Yogi & Philosopher (1863 - 1902), at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 ~

This is no less true now than when it was spoken over 100 years ago ~ in fact, it is even more true. And yet, I still believe we are going in the right direction. Our Buddha-nature is still in place.





## LESSONS OF HISTORY

"When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness."

~ Joseph Campbell,  
American Writer on Mythology, 1904 - 1987 ~

Truly, we can understand ourselves and make sense of life only in context, because we simply do not exist by ourselves. Sure, we will die, but then, so will everyone else, as has everyone else before us; what we cannot change we just have to accept and come to terms with; and life, limited though it is, is still worth living, especially if we do something to benefit others.

Islam reached what is now Pakistan in the 8th century, but it wasn't until the early 11<sup>th</sup> century that Muslims invaded the subcontinent of India on a large scale.

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At that time, most Indians were either Hindus or Buddhists, although Buddhism was already in decline, having grown rich and decadent through royal support; it was strong in the land of its birth for a thousand years, and reached its peak over 500 years earlier. A resurgent Hinduism had subverted Buddhism and was in the process of swallowing it.

India was ruled by many kings and princes who couldn't or wouldn't agree, and did not unite to face the Muslim invaders; as a result, they were easily defeated and slaughtered. The invaders built pyramids of heads. Some conquerors made it a rule to annually slaughter 100,000 Indians; Tamerlane once accomplished this in a single day! There was no U.N. in those days to raise a feeble and divided protest.

Buddhists came in for particularly hateful treatment, perhaps because they recognize and worship no God. Their

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monasteries and educational establishments were destroyed, the monks put to the sword, and Buddhism was driven out of India. Nalanda University ~ the oldest university in the world ~ had a student-body of 10,000 monks at that time; not many escaped. Most of India fell under Muslim rule for 700 years, until the British took power there, deposing the last Mughal Emperor in 1857.

While the Muslims were starting to invade India, Christian Europe began to launch Crusades to liberate 'The Holy Land' ~ and especially Jerusalem ~ from the Muslims, who had conquered and taken it from the Byzantines in the 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> centuries. Instigated by the Popes, who promised remission of sins for participating in these 'Holy Wars', people left homes and families on these great 'adventures', dreaming of loot and pillage; religion was just an excuse.

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Passing through Germany and Central Europe, Crusader armies slaughtered any Jews they encountered, as they'd been taught that Jews were the enemies of God, having killed Jesus; they left a trail of blood and misery all the way to Jerusalem, which they captured in 1099, and went on such a killing-spree that the streets ran ankle-deep in blood; almost no-one escaped the massacre; and all in the name of Jesus, the 'Prince of Peace'.

A name that many people associate with this period is Richard the First of England, known as 'The Lion Heart'. But he was a barbarian, and mass-slaughtered Muslims who fell into his hands. His Muslim counterpart, on the other hand, was much more chivalrous and cultured than him. We know him as Saladin. He recaptured Jerusalem from the Crusaders, and drove them back to the coast, where they held on in fortified castles.

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These Crusades lasted 200 years, until, running out of manpower, and realizing they would never achieve their objective, the marauders returned to Europe. Rivers of blood had been uselessly shed, so many people killed, so much hatred engendered, so much misunderstanding.

But the Crusades didn't really end, and were merely postponed; they have been resumed in our time. G.W. Bush unwisely used the term after September 11<sup>th</sup> to stir up patriotic feelings. It revived ancient memories of conflict between Christians and Muslims.

Most of us are familiar with the Arabic word '*Jihad*', so it's appropriate to say a little about this, as there is a real danger of it happening on a much-wider scale than has been seen before. I'm talking of religious or 'holy war.'

Mohammed claimed to have received the *Koran* from an angel in installments, but there is no way to either prove or disprove

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this; probably it was really his own work. He didn't always abide by his own teachings, however, and in fact, led his followers into battle on several occasions, setting the example of waging *jihad* on those who wouldn't accept his teachings.

A Middle-Eastern friend once explained to me that: "Muslims interpret *Jihad* as 'holy war', enjoined upon them to kill enemies of Islam. But if *only* if they would read between the Koran's lines, they would easily realize that *Jihad* means a *struggle* within oneself, not a war against others."

My friend went on: "*Jihad* is the *struggle* that a person must carry on within himself, against his personal self, in an attempt to find the everlasting peace within and reach the long-lost state of Oneness."

A world of difference between the two interpretations, and we know which prevails. Tamerlane ~ mentioned above ~ wasn't a

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Muslim, but a savage marauder who swept into India to loot and pillage. He also ravaged many Muslim countries, slaughtering as he went, and became known as 'The Scourge of God'. His religion, however, is open to dispute. He subscribed to the *shamanism* of his ancestors, but leaned towards Islam and had Muslim advisers, and so we may conclude that he was not against Islam as such; he was just a blood-thirsty monster.

The question: "Why do they hate us so much?" has often been asked since 9/11. Well, certainly, unwavering U.S. support of Israel has a lot to do with it, but envy and frustrated desire also play a part. The American life-style and Western consumer-goods are greatly admired by many Muslims, even while they condemn and revile the decadence of the West, a lot of which is just 'holy show.' When I was in Peshawar in 1998, I was invited to watch a porno movie in a private cinema; I

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declined, but was surprised that in an area where the Taliban had lots of support, there would be such things.

There's still a lot of goodwill in the Muslim world towards the West, and the U.S. would do well to heed to it and cultivate it instead of further alienating people who can be persuaded to kill and die for their beliefs.

The U.S. is now the only super-power, and likes to play 'world-policeman', so it behooves it to act as impartially as possible, and display justice instead of favoritism and manipulation; it is in its own interest, which can otherwise only decline; it does not live in isolation, but needs whatever goodwill it can get.

Is it too late to rectify the situation? Complete rectification, yes, but if efforts are made, there is still time to win back moderate Muslim support.

Muslims have or had a great sense of

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honor, and respect courage and integrity where shown. The West needs to show such things, and not let people down, as the U.S. did after the Gulf War in 1991, when George Bush Sr. urged the Kurds of Northern Iraq to rise up against Saddam Hussein, implying total support. When the Kurds acted upon his urging, however, Saddam had them slaughtered, and the U.S. sat back and did nothing to help. Who can admire and respect that sort of thing?



**BUT IT *MUST* BE TRUE, BECAUSE IT'S MINE**

When we say "I believe...", it means, 'I have an idea about something', and because we ~ the Great 'I' or Ego ~ has an idea, we take it to mean that it must be true, usually without examining or questioning it, because we *want* it to be true. Most of our ideas and beliefs come from others and are not really our own; we adopt and embrace religions and politics, speaking of them as if they are our own, unaware of the harm they cause.



### WHEN WE SEE WE'RE WRONG, CHANGE

"It often happens that scientists say, 'You know, that's a really good argument; my position is mistaken,' and then they would actually change their minds and you never hear that old view from them again. They really do it. It doesn't happen as often as it should, because scientists are human and change is sometimes painful. I can't recall the last time something like that happened in politics or religion."

~ Carl Sagan, American Astronomer and  
Author, 1934 -1996 ~

How firmly we hold onto our views and beliefs, afraid to consider for a moment that they might be wrong. In order to arrive at its present state, for example, science in the West was confronted and impeded every step of the way by religion, and there are still many people who believe in the myth of Creation, as found in the Bible!



## MAYBE IT'S WRONG

"Whenever a poet or preacher, chief  
or wizard spouts gibberish, the  
human race spends centuries  
deciphering the message."

~ Umberto Eco, Italian Writer, 1932 - ~

How often have we been deceived and misled. We accept whatever we are told, trying to make sense of nonsense, unsure of ourselves, thinking ourselves deficient rather than doubting the priests and salesmen. As a result, our suffering and ignorance go on and on. If we would consider the possibility that *it* ~ what we've been fed for centuries ~ might be wrong, rather than *us*, much of our confusion would cease forthwith.



**DON'T BE ASHAMED TO ADMIT IT**

"A man should never be ashamed to admit that he has been in the wrong, which is but saying, in other words, that he is wiser today than he was yesterday."

~ Alexander Pope,  
English Poet & Satirist, 1688 - 1744 ~

It is so hard for some people to admit to being wrong, as though they have an image of perfection to maintain, but realizing it frees us up; it's a form of liberation!



**NO TIME?**

"Time is life. It can neither be borrowed nor bought. Mis-spent time is life wasted."

~ Zarathustra, Founder of Zoroastrianism ~

"Do not say you have no time, for you have plenty of time; it is not a matter of lack of time, but disregard or disinclination."

~ J. Krishnamurti, 1895 - 1986 ~



## ABILITY TO LAUGH

"If you make the wrong decision,  
you make the wrong decision.  
That's all there is to it. There are  
few guarantees in life, and one of  
them is that you will make lots of  
mistakes. The worst thing you can  
do is to wimp out and spend your  
life in suspended animation ...  
refusing to make a choice because  
it may not be a perfect one."

~ Nicolas Lore, American Contemporary Writer ~

Because we *do* make lots of mistakes it helps  
to be able to laugh at ourselves at times  
instead of taking ourselves too  
seriously; but this is not to say that we should  
act the clown and deprecate ourselves, which  
is something else entirely.



## LIARS NEED GOOD MEMORIES

"He who tells a lie is unaware of the task he ~ undertakes, for he must tell twenty more to maintain that one."

~ Alexander Pope,  
English Poet, 1688 - 1744 ~

A liar must have a good memory, or else he will soon tie himself in knots and reveal himself as such. One who speaks the truth may forget everything; he won't contradict himself.





### NOT FOR A LONG TIME

"Gods are fragile things; they may be killed by a whiff of science or a dose of common sense."

~ Chapman Cohen, English freethinker,  
1868 - 1954 ~

How would our world be if our religions were overhauled and grounded in common sense? Quite, *quite* different than it is now, that's for sure. Sadly, however, this is wishful thinking, and we must reconcile ourselves to the fact that institutionalized ignorance will be with us for a long time to come.



## **OBVIOUS EFFECTS**

"An extraterrestrial being, newly arrived on Earth ~ scrutinizing what we mainly present to our children in television, radio, movies, newspapers, magazines, comics, and many books ~ might easily conclude that we are intent on teaching them murder, rape, cruelty, superstition, credulity and consumerism."

~ Carl Sagan, Astronomer & Writer, 1934 -1996 ~

Incredibly, doubt and debate still go on about the effect of TV on young minds, when it is all too obvious. We debase wonderful things like TV and use them for unworthy ends, instead of means to edify and enlighten us. Must it always be this way?



**ONLY THE STUPID ARE CERTAIN**

"The fundamental cause of trouble in the world today is that the stupid are certain while the intelligent are full of doubt."

~ Bertrand Russell, British Philosopher, 1872 - 1970 ~

Firm believers will not allow themselves to doubt because they fear it might all collapse, leaving them to build all over again. This is clearly so in the case of religious fundamentalists who make heaven their goal. Doubt is a friend of those who wish to find out; they become free of belief.



**REMIND YOURSELF**

"A hundred times a day I remind myself that my inner and outer life are based upon the labors of others."

~ Albert Einstein, 1879 - 1955 ~

Being part of everything, everything is part of us. We are never, *ever* alone!



**TOO SELF-ABSORBED**

"We are like butterflies who flutter  
for a day and think it's forever."

~ Carl Sagan, 1934 -1996 ~

And yet we are vain enough to think that  
the universe was created for and revolves  
around us!



**LET THEM GO**

"Forget injuries, but never forget kindnesses."

~ Confucius, Chinese Sage, 551- 479 BCE ~

If we recall injuries done to us by others it will only weigh us down to no useful purpose. Are we ourselves innocent of hurting others? How can we expect others to forgive us if we don't forgive them? Remembering kindness, however, can keep us warm on chilly days.



## A CHANGE OF HEART

"Nothing will benefit human health and increase the chances for survival of life on earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet."

~ Albert Einstein ~

Becoming vegetarian is more far-reaching in its effects than simply giving up eating meat; it really means a change of heart, and involves one's whole world-view. One sees how one fits in and can make a difference.



## REASON

"Reason is man's instrument for arriving at the truth; intelligence is man's instrument for manipulating the world more successfully; the former is essentially human, the later belongs to the animal part of man."

~ Erich Fromm, German-American  
Psychologist, 1900 - 1980 ~

The reason is a fine instrument, but it must be trained and developed, otherwise it can do a lot of harm.





**SLOWLY, NOT EASY**

"One may not reach the dawn  
except by the path of the night."

~ Kahlil Gibran, Lebanese Mystic & Writer,  
1883 -1931 ~

Slowly, and usually not without pain and  
hardship, do we arrive at wisdom, but  
when we do, it is without regret.



**MORE TO UNLEARN**

"Losing an illusion makes you wiser  
than finding a truth."

~ Ludwig Borne, German Journalist,  
1786 - 1837 ~

Perhaps we have just as much to unlearn  
as we have to learn, as many of the things  
we've been taught and believe are wrong.

"There's no need to search for the  
Truth ~

Just clear your beliefs away!"

Extract from "THE FAITHFUL MIND"  
by Zen Patriarch Seng Ts'an  
(translated from the Chinese by Tony Prince).



## SHARED INTERESTS

"Love does not consist of gazing at each other, but in looking together in the same direction."

~ Antoine de Saint-Exupery,  
French Author of "*The Little Prince*",  
1900 - 1944 ~

Physical attraction or body-chemistry is not enough to keep people together; there must be other things in common between them, some shared interests and joys.



**DON'T MAKE HIM MAD**

"To obtain a man's opinion of you,  
make him mad."

~ Oliver Wendell Holmes,  
American Jurist, 1841 - 1935 ~

If you don't really want to know what  
people think of you, don't upset them,  
otherwise it might all come out, making  
you unhappy.



## **AND STILL THERE ARE OPPONENTS**

"It is a century now since Darwin gave us the first glimpse of the origin of species. We know now what was unknown to all the preceding caravan of generations: that men are only fellow-voyagers in the odyssey of evolution. This new knowledge should give us, by this time, a sense of kinship with other fellow-creatures, a wish to live and let live, a sense of wonder over the magnitude and duration of the biotic community."

~ Aldo Leopald, American Conservationist,  
1886 - 1948 ~



## RIGHT BEFORE OUR EYES

"To put it bluntly, but fairly, anyone today who doubts that the variety of life on this planet was produced by a process of evolution is simply ignorant ~ *inexcusably* ignorant ~ in a world where three out of four people have learned to read and write."

~ Daniel Dennett, American philosopher, 1942 ~

Look at things you use ~ your car, TV, refrigerator, your books, your clothes, etc, etc. ~ and whether you call it evolution or simply development, the process is there before your eyes, and not just in living things.



## FALSE SECURITY

"When a person loses faith in his religion because he begins to study science and its methodology, it isn't that, through the obtaining of real knowledge, he knows it all, but he suddenly realizes he doesn't know it all."

~ Richard P. Feynman, American Nobel Prize-Winner in Physics, 1918 - 1988 ~

It is a peculiar conceit of many so-called religious people that they think they know everything to be known; this is probably because, feeling insecure and miniscule in the immensity of the universe, they grasp at things that give them a much-needed feeling of security, hence the continuation of untenable doctrines and beliefs that should have been discarded long ago.



**SOMETIMES RIGHT, SOMETIMES WRONG**

"Even a stopped clock is right twice  
a day."

~ Anonymous ~

Stumbling and staggering along, trying to  
make sense of life, we are never always  
right and never always wrong.

Recognizing when we are wrong does not  
fill us with a sense of failure but of humility  
and the courage to go on, because, at the  
same time, we also see that we are  
sometimes right. If we were always  
wrong, we would give up in despair,  
thinking that there's no point in going on.  
If we were always right we would become  
arrogant and intolerant.





## SCARS

Consider the scars on your hands ~ most of us have some. Each one has a story, and each one healed, though it took some time. Time heals all wounds if we allow it to, and don't insist on keeping them open.

There are different kinds of scars, some of them invisible ~ scars on the mind. Nothing is really forgotten, but merely stored away in the mind somewhere, waiting for someone or something to call it up; our *hard-drive* has a much bigger capacity than any p/c, and if we try to forget things, we remember them all the more. Forgetting isn't something we do, but something that happens.

Forgiving, however, is something we have more control over; it is a verb, an action, something we can do, and not really hard at all; we only think it's hard, and so we hold on to old grievances and grudges, which become burdens that weigh us down, and don't allow these scars to heal.



## STRANGE PARENT

If you have been pestered by people at your door peddling religion and wasting your time, you should exercise your rights and know how to deal with them.

"Be ready with a rebuttal when they recite a common verse. The favorite *fundagelical*\* verse is John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' In other words, the only way God could restrain himself from torturing us was to vent his anger by killing his natural son, and whosoever accepts that perverse notion of justice gets to move in with the guy, forever."

~ Dan Barker, ex-American Protestant Pastor, 1949 - in *Losing Faith in Faith* ~

(\* A word he coined meaning Fundamental-Evangelical).



## **ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY**

"Pray not, the Darkness will not brighten. Ask naught from the Silence, for it cannot speak. Vex not your mournful minds with pious pains. Ah, Brothers, Sisters, seek naught from the helpless gods by gift and hymn, nor bribe with blood, nor feed with fruit and cakes! Within yourselves Deliverance must be sought; each man his prison makes."

~ Sir Edwin Arnold: *"The Light of Asia"* ~

As humans, we must learn to accept responsibility ~ *and* credit ~ for our race. We have arrived here by the process of trial-and-error, not by the help or intervention of any God. If, on our way, we have created problems, we have the power to solve them, as we have done all along the way. It is in accepting responsibility instead of holding someone or something else responsible, that we find strength to deal with life.



**DON'T WAIT**

**"The world is so exquisite, with so much love and moral depth, that there is no reason to deceive ourselves with pretty stories for which there's little good evidence. Far better, it seems to me, in our vulnerability, is to look Death in the eye and to be grateful every day for the brief but magnificent opportunity that life provides."**

~ Carl Sagan, American Astrophysicist,  
1934 - 1996 ~

Since there is no evidence for life after death, we should find a reason for living this life responsibly, instead of like a business-investment that will hopefully ripen in an after-death state.



## **RUBBER-STAMP**

Idi Amin, the former dictator of Uganda who caused the deaths of hundreds-of-thousands of his people, and who ate human flesh, died and was buried in Saudi Arabia, where he'd been given sanctuary after he was ousted from power. Calling himself a Muslim and claiming to believe in God was enough to protect him from justice and enable him to live and die in luxury.

We must have a better system of justice than we've got now.

Article 29 of Indonesia's Constitution states that all its citizens must believe in God; failure to do so means they are atheists, which is not allowed. It doesn't matter how corrupt and dishonest you are as long as you believe in God. The concept of God is used as a rubber- stamp to condone and excuse all kinds of evil.



IT IS WHAT IT IS

"Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away."

~ Anonymous ~

This means that it doesn't depend upon us; rather, we depend upon *it*. It doesn't matter if we believe in it or not ~ just like gravity, things fall downwards, never upwards ~ and our hopes, wishes and prayers will never change it. It *is* what it *is*.



## BELIEF AND FAITH

"Faith is a cop-out. It is intellectual bankruptcy. If the only way you can accept an assertion is by faith, then you are conceding that it can't be taken on its own merits."

~ Dan Barker, Former Evangelist turned Atheist,  
Author and Critic ~

Clearly, Dan Barker saw some light here. He could have seen a bit more, though, could have perceived the difference between Belief and Faith. He was talking about Belief here, rather than Faith. Most followers of any religion only Believe; they have no real Faith, because Faith is born of experience ~ *good* experience ~ and knowledge applied. Without direct experience, Faith cannot arise; we can only *Believe*. Few people really experience the *heart* ~ the essence ~ of religion.

Of course, he is right: Religion should be able to withstand scrutiny without demanding unquestioning belief from people, and if it cannot, it should be left behind.



## RATIONAL AND IRRATIONAL

"As children tremble and fear everything in the darkness, so we in the light sometimes fear what is no more to be feared than the things children in the dark hold in terror..."

~ Lucretius, Roman Poet and Author, c 96 – 55 BCE, *On the Nature of Things* ~

Certainly, there *are* things to be feared, now as then, but many of our fears are irrational, born of ignorance, and we outgrow them as our knowledge and understanding expand. The world is still beset with deep-rooted superstitions, however, that have been with us a long time, and will be with us for a long time to come; this is why we have to struggle against them.





## DISCOVERY

"The known is finite, the unknown infinite; intellectually, we stand on an islet in the midst of a limitless ocean of inexplicability. Our business in every generation is to reclaim a little more land."

~ Thomas Henry Huxley, British Scientist and Educator, 1825 - 1895 ~

What a set-back Europe underwent during the Dark Ages, when, for a thousand years, almost nothing new was discovered or invented, and culture was at a standstill. Since Huxley's time, the opposite has been the case, with fantastic discoveries and advances being made virtually every day. What an exciting time to be alive, in spite of the dangers that threaten us all. Let us participate in it positively, if not by actually creating or discovering things ourselves, then at least by appreciating them for what they are. Those who appreciate things of benefit will hardly turn to destruction.



## VIPASSANA

"I truly believe the book of philosophy to be that which stands perpetually open before our eyes, though since it is written in characters different from those of our alphabet it cannot be read by [just] everyone."

~ Galileo Galilei, 1464 - 1642, Italian Scientist, persecuted by the Catholic Church for his announcement that the Earth revolves around the Sun rather than the Church-held belief of the other way around ~

We long ago became so used to what was right in front of us that we no longer saw it, and to see it now requires the deep realization or insight that Buddhists call *Vipassana*. However, this is not, as is commonly thought, a *practice* or something we do, but rather something that happens. There is no button we can press to make insight arise!



## **EVOLVED IN DIFFERENT WAYS**

When asked "Could you say the reason evolutionism is resisted so strongly is that our minds evolved to think in terms of personalities and entities rather than in terms of processes?" British scientist, Professor Richard Dawkins replied:

"Yes, it's the idea that somebody has got to be responsible. It's what children do ~ the petulant throwing of the tennis-racquet on the ground, blaming it for their bad shot. So is the reflex to sue somebody when you slip on the ice and sprain your ankle. Again, somebody has got to be blamed. It doesn't occur to many people that nobody is to blame, that it's just ice and it's slippery, and you fell down."

Clearly, our minds and bodies evolved at different rates, and in some ways, although our bodies recline in fine houses, our minds are still in caves. Physically, we

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may be mature, but mentally, in some ways, we are still children. We may be well-educated in certain areas, and sophisticated in some things, but in other ways we are quite ignorant and savage. There is no reason to be proud, but every reason to be humble.



## HUMAN GOD

"Is man one of God's blunders?  
Or is God one of man's blunders?"

~ Friedrich Nietzsche,  
German Philosopher, 1844 - 1900 ~

A God with qualities such as love, hate, anger, jealousy, favoritism, wrath, vengefulness, forgiveness, partiality, fickleness, fatigue, warmongering and destructive tendencies is obviously not just *one* of Man's blunders, but the *biggest* ~ worse than the most-powerful nuclear weapons! This blunder stands out now more than it has ever done before, hanging over the world in a cloud of the most appalling danger. Can we wake up to this in time, or must we pay the price for sleeping so long?



## **DRIVING IN REVERSE**

"If you accept the literal truth of every word of the Bible, then the Earth must be flat. The same is true for the Qu'ran. Pronouncing the Earth round then means you're an atheist. In 1993, the supreme religious authority of Saudi Arabia, Sheik Abdel-Aziz Ibn Baaz, issued an edict, declaring that the Earth is flat; anyone of the round-persuasion does not believe in God and should be punished. Among many ironies, the lucid evidence that the Earth is a sphere, accumulated by the second-century Graeco-Egyptian Claudius Ptolemaeus, was transmitted to the West by astronomers who were Muslim and Arab. In the 9th century, they named Ptolemy's book in which the sphericity of the Earth is demonstrated, the *Almagest*, 'The Greatest'."

~ Carl Sagan, in *The Demon-Haunted World* ~

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Islam had a glorious Golden Age many centuries ago, with great mathematicians, scientists, astronomers and medical specialists in such centers of lofty culture as Baghdad, Sicily and Spain, while Christian Europe was languishing through its Dark Ages. It was also remarkably liberal and tolerant compared with what it has become now. It means that it doesn't *have* to be like this; its past proves so.



## THE WONDER OF BOOKS

"Books.... permit us to interrogate the past with high accuracy; to tap the wisdom of our species; to understand the point of view of others, and not just those in power; to contemplate ~ with the best teachers ~ the insights, painfully extracted from Nature, of the greatest minds that ever were, drawn from the entire planet and from all of our history. They allow people long dead to talk inside our heads. Books can accompany us everywhere. Books are patient when we are slow to understand, allow us to go over the hard parts as many times as we wish, and are never critical of our lapses. Books are a key to understanding the world and participating in a democratic society."

~ Carl Sagan, in *The Demon-Haunted World* ~

We have been taught to read without

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being helped to understand this fantastic ability, and so have just taken it for granted, and underestimated it. Our recognition of symbols we call alphabets, gives us access to endless information that makes our lives so very rich.

There is a story of a tribe who had no written language ~ something no humans had until relatively recently (four to five thousand years is not really a long time) ~ and while this was alright for most of the tribe, one man was deaf, and therefore had no access to the oral lore of his tribe; consequently, he was handicapped in such a way that deaf people today are not, as they can learn to read.

One of our problems today is that we have largely lost our sense of wonder and appreciation of things. It can be cultivated and regained, but only with understanding and effort.



## EMASCULATED

We don't need to look very closely to see that many people are '*Begists*', following something that should rightly be called '*Begism*.' Religion should enable us to stand tall and not reduce us to beggars, considering ourselves *sinner*s and praying for help with every little thing. Until we grow up and accept responsibility for our lives, there will be little hope for the world.

I once met a Nepalese Christian, and asked him why he'd converted from Hinduism. "Because I'm a sinner, and I needed a saviour," he replied.

I then asked if he saw anything positive about being human, and after thinking for a few moments, he said, "Well, no, not really".

Nothing good about being human?!  
He had been robbed, cheated and  
emasculated!



## **IS GOD CONFUSED?**

Dan Barker, an American ex-Evangelical Pastor and Critic, wrote:

"Here is another argument based on ignorance. Ethical systems are based on the worth humans have assigned to life; 'good' is that which enhances life, and 'evil' is that which threatens it. We do not need a deity to tell us it is wrong to kill, lie or steal. Humans have always had the potential to use their minds to determine what is kind and reasonable. There is no 'universal moral urge', and not all ethical systems agree. Polygamy, human-sacrifice, cannibalism (Eucharist), wife-beating, self-mutilation, war, circumcision, castration, and incest are perfectly 'moral' actions in certain cultures. Is God confused?"

Morality should have a firmer base than belief and superstition. It should come

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from seeing how things are, from understanding *The Golden Rule*: "Do to others as you'd like others to do to you." Others are just like us in their hopes, fears and aspirations; everyone wants to be happy; no-one wants to suffer or be sad. When we put ourselves into others' shoes and feel what they feel, we will know better how to treat them.

But there are always exceptions to any rule, and the Golden Rule is no exception. What is good for us might not always be good for others, and the converse is equally so. Right may be wrong and wrong may be right, depending upon the point-of-view. Vegetarians would not be happy if offered meat. Meat-eaters might not be happy if served vegetarian food. So, "Do to others as you would like others to do to you" doesn't always work. It would be better phrased negatively, as Confucius did: "What you don't like others to do to you, don't do that to others."

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One of Aesop's Fables tells of a friendship ~ or a kind of friendship, a tenuous one ~ between a Fox and a Stork. One day, the Fox invited the Stork to dinner, and served soup on flat plates, which the Stork could not eat, of course, but which the Fox lapped up, happy over its trick.

Not long after, the Stork repaid the 'courtesy' by inviting the Fox to dinner, and served soup in a long-necked pitcher, which the Fox was unable to get its nose and tongue into. The Stork then showed the Fox how it was to be done, smiling all over its beak.

It is a mistake to suppose that because we ourselves like something, other people will like it, too, as that doesn't always follow. To avoid confusion, we might ask people what they prefer, and try to compromise.



## **MYTHS DEBUNKED**

"The world, men had begun to learn, was not a nest of revolving crystalline spheres with the earth at its precious center and man thereon as the chief concern of the moon, the sun, the planets, the fixed stars, and beyond all these, a King of Kings on a throne of jeweled gold, surrounded by nine rapturous choirs of many-winged luminous seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, virtues, powers, principalities, archangels and angels. Nor is there anywhere towards the core of this earth a pit of flaming souls, screaming, tortured by devils who are fallen angels all. There never was a Garden of Eden, where the first human pair ate forbidden fruit, seduced by a serpent who could talk, and so brought death into the world; for there had been death here for millenniums before the species Man evolved: the deaths of

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dinosaurs and trilobites, of birds, fish, and mammals, and even of creatures that were almost men.

Nor could there ever have occurred that universal Flood to float the toy menagerie of Noah's Ark to a summit of the Elburz range, whence the animals, then, would have studiously crawled, hopped, swum, or galloped to their continents: kangaroos and duck-billed platypuses to far-away Australia, llamas to Peru, guinea-pigs to Brazil, polar bears to the farthest north, and ostriches to the south. It is hard to believe today that for doubting such extravagances a philosopher (Giordano Bruno, 1548 - 1600), was actually burned alive in the Campo dei Fiori in Rome, or that as late as the year of Darwin's "Origin of the Species," 1859, men of authority still could quote this kind of lore against a work of science."

~ Joseph Campbell,  
in "CREATIVE MYTHOLOGY"~



**SMILE**

"Sometimes, my smile comes from  
my joy. Sometimes my joy comes  
from my smile."

~ Chogyam Trungpa, Tibetan Lama,  
1939 - 1987 ~

Sometimes, even though we may not be  
happy, if we smile, happiness may follow;  
we can induce it, or bluff our way through.

Smiling may carry us through lots of  
trouble and pain, may change black to  
white and blue to yellow.





## THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

Words are often ambiguous, and we look for meanings where there are none. Unwilling to accept things at face-value, and convinced that they contain mysteries, we interpret them according to our predilections.

Look at this hocus-pocus of the *bread-and-wine*, for example.

Charlatans are not slow to take advantage of our gullibility.



## LIBERATION

"Should one continue to base one's life on a system of belief that ~ for all its occasional wisdom and frequent beauty ~ is demonstrably untrue?"

~ Charles Templeton (former right-hand man to Evangelist Billy Graham) in *Farewell to God* ~

If I get no further in this life, I will count it enough to have escaped from such a system; it is what is known as 'Liberation'; I will never again enter that dark cave!



**DON'T SIMPLY BELIEVE!**

"Just as a goldsmith tests gold by cutting and rubbing, wise people accept my teachings after full examination and not just out of devotion to me."

~ Gotama Buddha, c. 623 – 543 BCE  
(dates uncertain) ~

Certain his teachings could stand up to any kind of examination and criticism, the Buddha never called people to believe and follow him blindly, never made promises of rewards for accepting what he said or threatened anyone with punishment for not doing so. Knowing that others had the capacity to experience what he had experienced, he exhorted people to find out for themselves.



**WOULD YOU LIVE FOREVER?**

"Millions long for immortality who  
don't know what to do on a Sunday  
afternoon."

~ Susan Ertz, American-born English  
Novelist, 1894 - 1985 ~

We often complain about boredom, so  
what would we do if we had to live  
forever? We would soon be wishing for  
termination. Clearly, many of us never  
bother to think about our beliefs; if we did,  
we'd probably discover a big gap between  
what we believe and how we live.



### TO LEARN, BE HUMBLE

"Sit down humbly as a little child, be prepared to give up all preconceived notions, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing."

~ Thomas Huxley, British Scientist,  
in *Darwin and Design* ~

Our minds are so full of beliefs and ideas gathered along our way, that there is almost no room for anything else; moreover, there is a great deal of pride on top of it all. Now and then, however, like flashes of lightning in a dark night, we get glimpses of reality, moments of insight that are not obtainable by effort, reminding us to be humble.



## **CONFORMITY AND NON-CONFORMITY**

There are things we must conform to ~ things which, because of long usage, become norms, the breaking of which will only cause trouble. One such is the way we drive. In the U.K, Australia and some other countries, we drive on the left, while in the U.S. and most other countries, we drive on the right. To defy convention just for the sake of being different and demonstrating our individuality, may not only result in heavy fines, but worse still, in severe injury or death.

Deliberate non-conformity is just another form of conformity, and we are still trapped. See the fashions in clothes, hairstyles and music; see the strange habit of smoking: if no-one else followed fashion or smoked, who would dare to be the only one to do so? Really, we should use our minds more than we do, and decide what we really want to do instead of merely aping others.



**EVERYONE'S A TEACHER**

"When you see a good man, try to emulate his example, and when you see a bad man, search yourself for his faults."

~ Confucius, Chinese Philosopher and Sage,  
551 - 479 BCE ~

That which we criticize in others is also there in ourselves, otherwise how would we recognize it in others?

There is no-one and nothing who is not our teacher if we know how to learn, and any teacher worthy of the name will help us to understand this. If he does not do so, but causes people to depend upon him like upon a drug, he has done them a disservice; he is then not a teacher, but a cheater!



## MISREPRESENTATION

I once visited a doctor for the results of a blood-test, and was surprised when he advised me to pray to the Buddha for help with my diabetes. "What does the Buddha have to do with diabetes?" I asked, amazed. "Why am I coming to you? You're the doctor!"

Here is a person, highly educated in a particular area, but quite dumb in another; he obviously thinks of the Buddha as some kind of god that can be bribed and petitioned! We are up against so much ignorance and superstition. Lots of Buddhists are guilty of misrepresenting the Buddha, just as Christians misrepresented Jesus.





### THREE-IN-ONE

"When two people meet there are really *six* people present. There is each person as he sees himself, each person as the other sees him, and each person as he really is."

~ William James, American  
Psychologist/Philosopher, 1842 - 1910 ~

If we saw ourselves as others see us, we would almost surely be surprised and probably would not recognize ourselves. But then, there are things ~ aspects of our deeper nature ~ that are hidden from most of us, and await discovery. We are really so complex, and much, *much* more than we think we are. To get at these things, however, we must get past the unpleasant side of ourselves; the treasures are not easily won, which is why few of us succeed.



**WE CAN LIVE QUITE WELL WITHOUT**

"I do not see any reason why animals should be slaughtered to serve as human diet when there are many substitutes. After all, man can live without meat."

~ Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama ~

Yes, we can live quite easily without meat; the animals cannot without their flesh. Unfortunately, the Dalai Lama's doctors did not agree with him when he decided to become vegetarian, and advised him to eat meat again, afraid he would not get enough nutrition and be weak. They ought to have taken elephants, horses, cows, yaks and buffaloes into account.



## A LONG STORY

"No man is so poor as to have  
nothing worth giving."

~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1807 - 1882,  
American Poet ~

As human beings, we have wealth that most of us don't know about. But how often do we think of ourselves as human, or understood what it means? Most of the time, we are contented and discontented with being separate, isolated, alienated people with names and identities, with stories going back only as far as our birth.

As human beings, however, we have stories stretching back millions of years, and the whole history of humanity is present in us all. Walk tall; we are human!

*We can understand!*



## THE FINAL BLOW

Life sometimes seems to be like striking a huge stone with a sledgehammer, blow after blow, with apparently little effect. Eventually, however, the stone may split ~ not as the result of the final blow alone, but as the cumulative effect of all the blows before it. Nothing comes from nothing. Have faith in what you are doing, and do it with your heart.



## **OTHERS ARE JUST LIKE US**

Step out of yourself for a few moments and you will see that others are not much different from you in their hopes and desire for happiness, and just as much in fear of pain and suffering. Do this every now-and-then, and you might find your attitudes changing; you might even find a feeling for the sanctity of life developing. *Dangerous!* You might be unable to live any longer in a comfortable cocoon of selfishness, thinking that because you are alright, the rest of the world is, too.



## **NO-ONE TO BLAME OR PRAISE**

"Life is raw material. We are artisans. We can sculpt our existence into something beautiful, or debase it into ugliness. It's in our hands."

~ Anonymous ~

There is no-one to blame or praise for the situation we find ourselves in, not even ourselves; it's all the working out of causes, most of which are beyond our control or even knowledge. Needless to say, we could all be more fortunate than we are, but on the other hand, we could also be less so. Instead of complaining that life has not treated us kindly or fairly, let us see what we can do with it. There are countless people who would change places with us right now if they could.



## LOOK FOR THE COMMON DENOMINATORS

All religions are afflicted by sectarianism, with all the acrimony and ill-feelings that accompany it.

Although Buddhism is spreading in the West, unfortunately, it is along sectarian lines, and sectarianism comes from the idea that 'our way is right and other ways are wrong'; there is also fear that others might be right and we wrong, but we dare not acknowledge this.

The only way to overcome sectarianism is to focus on universal realities and things we have in common (and there are more than we realize), things that unite us rather than divide us.



**UNFORGETTABLE**

“When you make the finding  
yourself ~ even if you're the last  
person on Earth to see the light ~  
you never forget it.”

~ Carl Sagan, American Astrophysicist,  
1934 - 1996 ~

Most of our lives we live vicariously,  
through others, which really means living  
second-hand. Now and then, however, we  
have the joy of living directly, of  
experiencing things so closely and  
intimately that although other people may  
have had the same experiences, words  
are inadequate to express them. Such  
experiences transform and fulfill us,  
making us more complete.





## TWO PARTS

There are two parts to Buddhism: the part of the past, that includes the stories of the Buddha, which cannot be verified, and the part of the present, the Now, the Eternal Dharma, which is ours to experience.

We should remember two things: first, the propensity of the Indian mind for exaggeration that staggers the imagination, and second, that the Buddha often used *upaya* ~ techniques or skillful-means ~ to awaken people, things that weren't literally true nor meant to be taken so. How can we tell if something should be taken literally or metaphorically? It is not always clear. Many things in the scriptures cannot be verified, proved or disproved, but this doesn't mean we should just accept everything at face-value. Just like with the fables of Aesop, we should look for the lessons therein and not get stuck on the forms.

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The voluminous Buddhist scriptures are known as “*The Tripitaka*” ~ that is, “The Three Baskets” or Collections. People who tend to take everything literally, might not be very pleased to hear that they were not so designated by the Buddha Himself, as they were not committed to writing and given a name until 500 years after He died, and by then, of course, they had undergone considerable change (just as did the Bible of the Christians, which underwent the process of clerical editing).

Buddhism was forced to change to suit the desires and demands of the masses for something to worship and pray to for help and salvation, and thus the simplicity and clarity of the Buddha’s message was compromised.

We must recall, too, that the Buddhist texts were written by monks, who are notoriously misogynistic, and in parts are therefore quite sexist. Had women written the books, we would have quite a different story!



### **STILL UP AGAINST IT**

"I believe in the religion of reason ~  
the gospel of this world; in the  
development of the mind, in the  
accumulation of intellectual wealth,  
to the end that man may free  
himself from superstitious fear, to  
the end that he may take advantage  
of the forces of nature to feed and  
clothe the world."

~ Robert G. Ingersoll, American Freethinker and  
Opponent of Superstitious Religion, 1833 - 1899 ~

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are still beset by  
superstition and fear, but this is not surprising;  
we did not emerge from our caves overnight.  
And yet, all around are the signs of progress;  
against tremendous odds and the forces in  
inertia, we have achieved widespread literacy,  
eradicated fatal diseases, and pushed back  
our frontiers; only a fool will complain that we  
have not achieved perfection merely because  
much remains to be done.



## GODISM

"The word 'atheist' is a thoroughly honest, unambiguous term. It means one who does not believe in God, and it means neither more nor less."

~ Robert Flint, British theologian ~

These days, many people claim to be atheists, though without ~ in many cases ~ understanding what the word means. It depends upon what the word 'God' means (*Theo*, in Greek, hence 'theist': believer in *Theo*; *theology*: the science of *Theo*, although it is not a science at all); disbelief implies belief, does it not? The two always go together, and we cannot have one without the other. We cannot disbelieve something if we don't believe it first.

So, what do we mean by the word 'God'? A word is not a thing. We know the word ~ everyone does ~ but what, if anything,

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does it represent? Before we can discuss the matter further, we must know the answer to this question without resorting to empty and worn-out cliches like, 'God is the Creator of the Universe', 'God is Love', etc. The onus of proving something rests upon those who believe in it, not upon those who don't, and they have never been able to prove it, because it's a myth. They are quite welcome to believe it ~ believe whatever you want ~ as long as you don't try to force your ideas upon others. So, no more witch-hunts or persecution of any kind, eh?



## UNNATURAL

The Vatican opposes contraception on the grounds that it is unnatural, and anything unnatural is against the Laws of God. Well, riding around in a Pope-mobile ~ or *any* vehicle, for that matter ~ is unnatural, as is living in a building of any kind, wearing clothes, eating cooked food, etc, etc, etc. Why should the Popes single out contraception, when there are so many things about us that are unnatural? They should be consistent, and go naked, living under trees, and answering the calls-of-nature whenever the urge to do so arises.

We went against nature a long time ago ~ perhaps when we learned how to use fire ~ and can never go back to it; just try, and see. Stop being such a hypocrite, Pop, and set an example by becoming a naturalist!



## INVOLVEMENT

"Each snowflake in an avalanche  
pleads not guilty."

~ Stanislaw J. Lee, 1909 -1966, Polish Writer ~

How often do we turn away from life, not wanting to be involved, saying, "It's not my business. I don't care!"? But we *are* involved, involved with everything ~ in some degree, no matter how big or small ~ by virtue of the fact that we are connected to and part of everything, not separate and independent. We are all responsible for everything that goes on in our world. We must *learn* to care more than we do.



### **EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON?**

Karma is *not* predestination. The present is open-ended; our life unfolds as we go along; moreover, we change it all the time, to some degree. And we can certainly learn to look at things in such a way that we may respond differently to the changes of life than we used to do.

So often, we hear people say: "Everything happens for a reason," but this is really *not* so. Does cancer happen for a reason? Do people get killed in car-smashes for a reason? Who or what is in control of things, deciding what will happen, and why? Things happen as a result of causes, and each effect requires and involves many causes, not just one.

Free yourself! There is no need to look for a reason or purpose in it all. *Give* life a purpose ~ a positive purpose ~ by living well and seeing, *feeling* your place in it all.





## TO WHOM OR WHAT SHOULD I PRAY?

As an atheist, I do not pray.

There is no-one responsible, no-one  
to praise or blame ~ not even myself ~

for the situation I find myself in;

like everything else, it is a result of  
causes and conditions. It is up to me  
to make what I can of it and whatever  
lies ahead, relying upon the strength  
of my convictions.

I don't have to like it,  
and it doesn't have to be nice.



**HOLD ON. IT WILL PASS.**

"If you're going through hell, keep going."

~ Winston Churchill ~

It is a phrase we sometimes hear people say, isn't it? ~ "I'm going through *hell*." They may think so, and indeed, it may appear so, depending upon their concept of hell ~ a concept, as there is not the least bit of evidence for hell as a place. What they mean is that they are going through a really hard time, suffering, sick, in danger, etc., things that are very real.

Hell is a state of mind, and we could hardly expect anyone to be bursting with joy if they or someone near and dear to them were in terrible pain, for example.

It helps to know something about the Law of Change ~ that nothing lasts forever, but changes constantly, although we cannot always see this, and change is

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not always as rapid as we would like it to be. Sometimes, however, it is so subtle, that we do not observe it, and suddenly, we realize that our troubles have passed, like clouds that covered the moon.

Hold on, in times of hell, and know that it will pass; keep going, and whatever you do, don't stop and stay there!



**I LIVED!**

None of us, except the least imaginative, can do everything we want to do in the brief time we live, but we all do many things ~ either directly, ourselves, or indirectly, through others ~ and should feel happy at having done and witnessed so many things. When it comes time to die, instead of feeling regret at having missed certain things, we might think of all the things we *did*, and be able to say, "*I lived!*"

Life is boring, and nothing interesting ever happens to you, you say? Nonsense! Life is never boring, but endlessly fascinating, although not always to our liking or expectations. Learn to see life as an adventure instead of something planned and fully mapped-out; enter into the spirit of unfolding!



## **SO MANY HANDS!**

Our lives are full of kindness; how sad we seldom notice it.

Do you see or sense the hands ~ so *many hands* ~ that play a part and help to bring our food (our clothes, our homes, our cars, books, phones, computers ~ in fact, *everything*) to us? Here are some plowing, planting and harvesting crops; here are some at the wheels of tractors, others driving trucks and buses, piloting planes, delving deep in the ground, planting forests and cutting them down; there are some weaving cloth, making shoes, at work in factories producing cars, TVs, refrigerators, stoves, pots and pans, and so on, endlessly, all working for you and I. Think of it; the things you have and use haven't come easily; the fact that we have money to buy them doesn't change this.

Humbly, give thanks.



### **THE ROAD AHEAD**

Where have you been,  
And where will you go?  
The road ahead is dim,  
And undoubtedly the future holds  
Much weariness, sorrow and pain;  
It holds despair, danger and fear,  
Loneliness and sadness.

What's the point of going on?  
Why not give up now?

Ah, but ...

That's not all the future holds;  
There'll also be opportunities to learn  
Lessons of life you need to know;  
There'll be joy as well as sorrow;  
You'll encounter friends as well as foes,  
Sympathy as well as indifference,  
Welcome as well as rejection,  
Honesty as well as deception,  
Wisdom as well as stupidity,  
Love as well as hate,  
Goodness as well as evil.  
And so, onwards!



## INSPIRATION

"The mind is not a vessel to be filled  
but a fire to be kindled."

~ Plutarch - circa 45 - 125 C.E., Historian and  
Priest of the Delphic Oracle ~

Such fire is known as inspiration, and  
with this, the mind becomes energized  
and capable of wonders; without it, it  
remains dull and lethargic.



## WHY?

Nature is impersonal and impartial, and cares nothing if we live and die; prayer to it is unavailing. In the future, when we have evolved more and learned to accept responsibility for our lives instead of ascribing things to gods or demons (as many people still do), or fortune and luck, the question: "Do you believe in God?" will give way to "*Why* do you believe in God?"

God will be looked upon as a vestige of our primitive past, when we didn't understand the forces of nature and imagined spirits in storms, floods, earthquakes, droughts, pestilence, and so on, and sought to appease them with prayers, petitions and sacrifices. Many gods were 'born' this way; many have been 'pensioned-off' and forgotten, as they never existed to begin with.





**IN OTHERS' SHOES**

"The highest realms of thought are impossible to reach without first attaining an understanding of compassion."

~ Socrates, Greek Philosopher and Teacher, 469  
- 399 BCE ~

Compassion, at *least*, means a seeing beyond oneself, an opening up to others, a recognition that they are just like us and we are just like them, a putting of oneself into other's places.



**DON'T TURN AWAY**

"To forgive and accept injustice is cowardice."

~ Mahatma Gandhi, 1869 - 1947 ~

If we keep quiet about injustice or wrong for the sake of convenience or 'can't-be-bothered', we thereby give it our tacit consent, and are complicit in the wrong.

Of course, we are well aware that the rich and powerful are often above the law, but if people who commit atrocious crimes against humanity are brought to justice ~ as is happening now in *some* cases ~ perhaps others will think twice about doing similar things; then again, perhaps they won't, but even so, we cannot simply forgive them and write off their crimes.



## NOT FOR THE PROUD

“The hardest part about gaining any new idea is sweeping out the false idea occupying that niche. As long as that niche is occupied, evidence and proof and logical demonstration get nowhere. But once the niche is emptied of the wrong idea that has been filling it ~ once you can honestly say, "I don't know" ~ then it becomes possible to get at the truth.”

~ Robert A. Heinlein ~ (Science-fiction writer)

Ignorance, prejudice and wrong ideas have been so long entrenched in our minds that it is very hard to uproot and replace them; slowly, slowly, does it happen.



### DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

"All religions are equally sublime to the ignorant, useful to the politician, and ridiculous to the philosopher."

~ Titus Lucretius Carus, 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE, Roman poet who wrote a philosophical poem, *On the Nature of Things*, by which he hoped to free humanity from the fear of death and the gods, considering these the main cause of human unhappiness. ~

Obviously, religion means different things to different people, and we may come to see it in different ways during the course of our lives. Things change, ideas change, we change. We wear shoes of varying sizes during our lives, from baby-shoes, to adult shoes, not baby-shoes throughout.

Everyone thinks his religion is the best, otherwise he wouldn't follow it. Some people use religion when it suits their purposes, but are not religious in any way, and in fact, just the opposite. Yet other people see religion as a stage we pass through or a crutch to help us at times.



**ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HELP**

"If I have seen further than others, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants."

~ Sir Isaac Newton, English Scientist and Mathematician, 1642 -1727 ~

Indeed, no-one achieves or does anything by himself, but only with the help and support of countless other people, living and dead. Realization of this leaves no room for arrogance and feelings of superiority.



## GOOD OLD DAYS?

"When I hear somebody sigh that  
'Life is hard,' I am always tempted  
to ask, 'Compared to what?' "

~ Sidney J. Harris, 1917 - 1986, American  
Newspaper Columnist ~

"Stop the world, I want to get off!"

Life is what it is, a grab-bag of many things and many shades, not just of black-and-white. We complain and say it's hard and unfair when it doesn't go as we wish, but forget about this when things start to get better, and then we want to stay on and continue the ride. And whoever said that life should be easy anyway? It sounds like an election promise, doesn't it? And most of us know how *they* are usually just a lot of hot air!

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We probably would not like to live in the Middle Ages, for just one example, when life was much more precarious than it is now, and people believed that sickness and disease was caused by demons ~ and no social-security systems, either!



## **ANSWERS WITHOUT QUESTIONS**

"The mere formulation of a problem is far more essential than its solution, which may merely be a matter of mathematical or experimental skills. To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle requires creative imagination and marks real advances in science."

~ Albert Einstein ~

Perhaps we are too concerned with answers, when sometimes we don't even know the questions. If we know how to ask questions ~ to think about and formulate them carefully ~ we may often find the answers therein. However, many of us have answers before we know the questions ~ answers provided by others ~ but this is never satisfactory. We have actually been stuffed full of answers. Unless the questions are ours, the answers will never fit.





## SCAPEGOATS

"What makes our opponents useful is that they allow us to believe that without them we would be able to realize our goals."

~ Jean Rostand, French Biologist and Author,  
1894 - 1977 ~

Yes, our enemies unwittingly perform a useful service, not only in providing us with someone to blame for not succeeding as we think we should, but also because we would miss them terribly. Some of us make a career out of denouncing our enemies and holding them accountable for whatever happens to us that we don't like; such is the idea of *scapegoats*.



## A DIFFERENT MATTER ALTOGETHER

Have you noticed how we criticize our *own* country, race, institutions and religions, but when people of different races, countries, religions ~ do so, we immediately become defensive or even aggressive? What is happening here? Are we sincere in our criticisms and do we really mean what we say, or not?

Are the criticisms of others unjust or exaggerated? Or is it that we take the criticism of others as a criticism of ourselves personally, of our dear Ego? This is the crux of the matter, isn't it: Ego, the idea of *my* country, *my* race, *my* religion, *my* this, *my* that ~ things that are just an extension of our Ego? While we ourselves may criticize *our* things, if other people criticize them, it's quite another matter. It seems that to look at things objectively requires a degree of enlightenment that most of us poor humans do not have.



## **FAITH FROM EXPERIENCE**

"Faith is much better than belief.

Belief is when someone else  
does the thinking."

~ Buckminster Fuller, 1895 - 1983, American  
Scientist-Philosopher ~

Our minds have been filled with belief by others, and we allowed it to happen. If we had not been told about God, Moses, Jesus, The Buddha, Krishna, Mohammed, and all the other people we believe in, how would our belief have arisen? Faith, however, can never be second-hand; it must arise ~ *if* it arises ~ from direct personal experience of something ~ and something good, at that, as we would never have faith in something bad!



**“THE EARTH IS ROUND!”**

"The Church says the Earth is flat, but I know that it is round, for I have seen the shadow on the moon, and I have more faith in a shadow than in the Church."

~ Ferdinand Magellan, 1480 - 1521,  
Portuguese navigator and explorer, the first  
European to cross the Pacific Ocean ~

Brave man, Magellan, to say such a thing  
when the *Inquisition* held sway, and the  
rack and stake were hungry for 'heretics.'  
However did he manage to escape?

Belief gives way to Fact, but not without a  
struggle; Western science had to face  
opposition at every step of the way, and  
why not? It is only thus that Fact is  
established, and Belief dethroned.



## THOSE WHO RULE

I once knew someone who was so dishonest that he didn't just tell lies at times, but sometimes didn't! And when a person can lie like that, there is nothing he won't do; it was so in his case.

It is only with great difficulty that we have overcome some of the many diseases that afflict us, like smallpox and leprosy, and as we struggle with others, even more arise, like *AIDS* and *SARS*. In spite of this, some people are actively employed in producing chemical and biological weapons, like *Sarin* nerve-gas and anthrax. Is there anything more evil than this? When governments can even contemplate such weapons, let alone manufacture them, there is really nothing *they* won't do. We are in the hands of maniacs and have grown used to it!



## SHARE YOUR LIGHT

"A candle loses nothing by lighting  
another candle."

~ Anonymous ~

We live in dependence upon others;  
whatever we have and are has come from  
others, and yet some of us are reluctant to  
share, afraid we might lose by doing so. In  
actual fact, by sharing, we discover that  
we have so much, whereas in holding  
back, we never learn this, and live like a  
poor man sitting on a goldmine.



## **SO MANY THINGS YOU COULD HAVE**

"If you have nothing for which to be thankful, make up your mind that there's something wrong with you. If you think you haven't much to be thankful for, why not be thankful for some of the things you don't have?"

~ Anonymous ~

No doubt there are things we would like to have, but there are also things we wouldn't like; TV shows us plenty of both, and we don't even need to go out into the *real* world to learn this. The advertisements are constantly urging us to buy, promising happiness if we do. But the news, in particular, shows us how fortunate we are to be without many things that other people have! Gratitude, therefore, is just as much about not having, as it is with having. If you feel that nothing good is happening to you, go along to a hospital or nursing-home; it will change your mind.



## **PRAISE GIVEN AND RECEIVED**

"Praise is like sunshine to the human spirit; we cannot flower without it."

~ Henry N. Ferguson ~

Praise is sweet, but we must know the difference between genuine, deserved praise and hollow flattery, so that we don't get led astray. We all know the tale about the fox who tricked the crow into letting go of the bread in its beak by asking it to sing; no-one had *ever* asked the crow to *sing* before.

Without false modesty, we should graciously accept praise in the spirit it is given, too, and thank the giver as we would for another type of gift. If we refuse a freely-given gift, the giver may be hurt or offended.

Honest praise is also something we should give as well as receive; some people have lots of praiseworthy qualities, while others have few; but if we look hard enough, we will find something, and it can make a great deal of difference if we do; a few drops of kindness may soften hard hearts.





## SEEING IN DIFFERENT WAYS

"Some people complain that roses have thorns; I am thankful that thorns have roses."

~ Anonymous ~

Since suffering is the response of the mind to things we regard as unpleasant, if we would learn to look at things in different ways, much of our suffering would cease. This requires a willingness to change, and let go of old habits ~ easier said than done, but not impossible.



### SIMPLY HUMAN

"The only really consistent people  
are the dead."

~ Aldous Huxley, 1894 - 1963, English Critic and  
Novelist ~

There may be exceptions to this, but they are so rare that we may consider this to be generally true; none of us live in complete accord with what we say. We often say things that contradict what we've said earlier, or do things that belie our stated principles; it is as if we are schizophrenic, and we catch ourselves out now and then. Some of it is due to carelessness, some to dishonesty, some to hypocrisy, some for the sake of expediency, and some to the fact that we are still becoming, growing, changing, and have not reached a point where we feel complete ~ in other words, simply because we are human.



**THIS IS IT ~ ALL WE'VE GOT**

"The moving finger writes,  
And, having writ, moves on.

Nor all thy piety nor wit,  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a  
line,

Nor all thy tears wash out a word of  
it."

~ Omar Khayyam, 1050? - 1122, Persian Poet  
and Mathematician, *The Rubaiyat* ~

Life is not a dress-rehearsal; this is it, all  
we've got, the real thing, at every  
moment, and if we miss it, it never comes  
again; we never get a second shot at the  
present, and nothing is ever repeated.



## **DON'T LOOK TOO FAR AHEAD**

"Refrain from asking what is going to happen tomorrow, and every day that fortune grants you, count as gain."

~ Horace, Roman Poet and Satirist,  
65 - 8 BCE ~

With our eyes fixed on tomorrow, we miss a lot of what is here with us now, and thus never really live at all. Today is as full as a day ever gets, no day having more or less than 24 hours, or opportunities for realization. And if the present is not as we would like it, with clearer vision, we may still extract something from it.



ONE TONGUE, TWO EARS

"Nature gave us one tongue and  
two ears so we could listen twice as  
much as we speak."

~ Epictetus, 50 - 130 CE, Greek-born Roman  
slave and Philosopher ~

We are often so full of our own opinions  
and the desire to speak that it seems  
we have *two* tongues and *one* ear.  
Listening requires humility.



## PLANT A TREE

"He that plants trees loves others  
besides himself."

~ English proverb ~

When we care enough to do things for others, we step outside of ourselves; the more we do for others, the more we overcome our selfishness. Love truly overcomes the ego. If we plant trees, we may not be around when they've grown to provide shade, but someone else will; we often sit in the shade of trees planted by others, do we not?

Go ahead, plant your tree!



## A WORKABLE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

"You cannot be lonely if you like the person you're alone with."

~ Wayne Dyer, Contemporary American  
Motivational Writer ~

What an awful feeling loneliness is, but as with other things we suffer from, we have some choice over it. As we go along, we really should put together a workable philosophy of life to enable us to deal with such things, rather than expecting too much from life, otherwise we shall suffer so much needlessly. But of course, this comes from a basic understanding of how life is, and if our philosophy is not built on a realistic understanding of life, however will it help us to deal with the rising and falling, coming and going of things?



## TWO-EDGED SWORD

"The difference between a smart man and a wise man is that a smart man knows what to say, a wise man knows whether to say it or not."

~ Frank M. Garafola ~

Even though a thing might be true and should be said, it is sometimes better not to say it, as a hasty word often leaves one regretting having said it. Truth is like a sword ~ not only may it cut through ignorance, but it may also cut those who are unready for it. If *only* I would keep this in mind and not let my tongue run away with me!





## THE ETERNAL NOW

"Eternity has nothing to do with the hereafter..... This is it.... If you don't get it here, you won't get it anywhere. The experience of eternity right here and now is the function of life. Heaven is not the place to have the experience; here's the place to have it."

~ Joseph Campbell, 1904 - 1987, American Mythologist ~

If I keep hammering away at this theme it's because, having glimpsed it, I need to remind myself of it, too, as it is not an experience that stays with us, but comes and goes. Having seen it, however, it leaves an indelible impression that helps sustain us through hard times.



**KEEP YOUR WORD**

"In great matters men show  
themselves as they wish to be seen;  
in small matters, as they are."

~ Gamaliel Bradford, 1863 - 1932, American  
Poet ~

We may judge a person's  
trustworthiness by the extent that he  
forgets having given his word about  
something. One's word is important ~  
whether about great things or small ~  
and should not be lightly given.



**POOR SUBSTITUTE**

"When one loses the deep intimate relationship with nature then temples, mosques and churches become important."

~ J. Krishnamurti, Sage, 1895 - 1986 ~

If religion is not based upon reality ~ that is, Nature ~ but upon fancy and fantasy, it leads to all kinds of mischief. Can we ~ *dare* we ~ check our religion to see how much it accords with Nature?



## DICHOTOMY

"If you love the sacred and despise the ordinary, you are still bobbing on the ocean of delusion."

~ Lin-Chi, Patriarch of the Koan School of Zen,  
Died 866 CE ~

Because it has a vested interest in doing so, organized religion has fostered the belief in us that life somehow consists of the special and the ordinary, the mundane and the supramundane, the worldly, and the sacred, and this erroneous belief prevents us from seeing the wonder of life all around us. True, there *is* beauty in the buildings dedicated to religion and the pageantry of religious ceremonies, but it is nothing compared to the magnificent shows that nature constantly stages for free. To live religiously, we do not need temples or churches, ceremonies, priests, candles, bells, or incense, or days set aside as holy.



**NO NEED TO TALK ABOUT IT**

"Being powerful is being like a lady.  
If you have to tell people you are,  
you aren't!"

~ Maggie Thatcher, *The Iron Lady*,  
Former Prime Minister of the U.K. ~

The same applies to following the Way:  
there is too much talk of morality and  
virtue. If we have the real thing, there's  
no need to talk of it; if we haven't got it,  
to talk about it is just hot air!



## DO IT YOURSELF

"The best helping hand that you will ever receive is the one at the end of your own arm."

~ Fred Dehner ~

And this is what education is all about: helping us realize our potential and learn to depend more upon ourselves. The idea that we need someone to *save us* is debilitating and weakening, and yet it continues to be widely propagated. But look: If you are hungry, and someone says to you, "Oh, never mind, no problem; I will eat two times, one for me and one for you," will that appease your hunger?



## RESONANCE

"People say that what we are seeking is a meaning for life ..... I think that what we are all seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life-experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonance within our innermost being and reality, so that we can actually feel the rapture of being alive."

~ Joseph Campbell, American Mythologist ~

Life is a struggle, not just *against* things, but also *for* things, and it's when we feel it the most that we are nearest to breaking through and finding this resonance.



## **BACK OFF A LITTLE**

"Every now and then go away, have a little relaxation, for when you come back to your work your judgment will be surer since to remain constantly at work will cause you to lose power of judgment."

~ Leonardo da Vinci, Renaissance Artist  
and Inventor ~

To back off a little, or even to take a nap and sleep on things, allows new ideas and more energy to arise, which are essential for completing any work well. If we are always close up to things, we may lose sight of the bigger picture and see only that fragment before our eyes.





## WHY ME?

"We have no right to ask when a sorrow comes, "Why is this happening to me?" unless we ask the same question for every joy that comes our way."

~ Philip F. Bernstein ~

Whining and self-pity never improves our situation, but only makes it worse, and we *choose* to do it; it is so immature. Why me?

*Why not?*



## LISTENING TO OTHERS

"We cannot let another person into our hearts unless we empty ourselves. We can truly listen to him or truly hear her only out of emptiness."

~ M. Scott Peck, American  
Inspirational Writer ~

Emptying oneself means to put aside the ego, or the dominant thoughts of 'I', 'Me' and 'Mine' ~ for a while, at least; we cannot do it permanently, unfortunately, as such is not within our capacity ~ in the recognition that someone *e/se* is important. We've all had the experience of not being listened to, and so know that it's not a thing we should subject another to. Pay others the compliment of listening to them.



## **NEW YEAR, NEW DAY, NEW MOMENT**

We enter a New Year as upon uncharted territory, which, of course, it is, as no-one's been here before. But isn't this so with every day of our lives ~ in fact, with every *moment*? When we awake in the morning, we cannot possibly know what awaits us in the day ahead, and this is why we need to be flexible, so that if the plans we make don't work out ~ as often happens ~ we can switch to something else without too much trouble. If we are not flexible, if we are too attached to our plans and ideas, if we live our lives like a train running along its tracks, we will miss so much along the way.

We don't need to be clairvoyant to know that there will be hardships ahead, because life doesn't build super-highways for us to travel smoothly on. But there will also be good things ~ *and* successes ~ that we don't expect; these are treats along the way for us to enjoy and derive courage from.



### LIGHT A CANDLE

"Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope."

~ Robert F. Kennedy, 1925 - 1968,  
American Attorney-General, Senator ~

Yes, and he might get shot or otherwise terminated, too, but improvement in the human condition has seldom been easy or cheaply bought. Our way has been lit by many people holding candles in the darkness. If we do not yet have a candle of our own, we should try to kindle one; the world needs more light.



## NOT JUST FOR OURSELVES

"Education, in the broadest or truest sense, will make an individual seek to help all people, regardless of race, regardless of color, regardless of condition."

~ George Washington Carver, 1864 - 1943,  
American Scientist ~

He seems to be talking of the mind of a *bodhisattva* here, one who sees beyond the differences between us, and realizes that our true welfare lies, through education, in emancipation of the mind. Such people live not just for themselves, but for others around them.



## UNHEALTHY OBSESSION

"Quit worrying about your health; it will go away."

~ Robert Orben, 1927 - , U.S. Humorist and Screen-writer ~

Our obsession with health, as at present, is an unhealthy thing, and will only cause us unnecessary suffering. While we *should* take care, we should never forget that nothing lasts forever, and that our health will ultimately break down (if we don't die first, of course). On the other hand, however, many people ~ assisted by the tobacco-companies and alcohol manufacturers, for example ~ deliberately destroy their health and seem bent upon suicide.



## THE BLESSINGS OF EDUCATION

"Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance."

~ Will Durant, 1885 - 1981, American Historian ~

Have we not come a long way? So many superstitions and dogmas have been exposed and debunked, proportionately freeing us. We might have gone *on* believing that the Universe and everything in it was created in six days just over 4,000 years ago, and that the planet upon which we live was the center of that Universe. We might still be living under the illusion that our Earth was flat, and that if we sailed too far over the ocean, we would fall off the edge. We might still believe that disease is caused by demons, and any number of other preposterous things. The process of discovery goes on, and it's exciting. We cannot afford to make up our minds and arrive at final conclusions. Better to acknowledge our ignorance and say, "I don't know".



## DELUSION IS SO STRONG

"Who says I am not under the special protection of God?"

~ Adolph Hitler, 1889 - 1945 ~

The power to delude ourselves is such that even *Hitler* thought that what he was doing was right, otherwise he wouldn't have done it.

Regarding Hitler, too ~ just as there are people who, out of adulation and wishful-thinking, believe that Elvis Presley is still alive, so there are people who, out of fear, cannot accept that Hitler is dead after all these years, that because he was so powerful and evil, he must have achieved some sort of immortality and is waiting to reappear. We continue to delude ourselves.





## FREEDOM

Freedom is something that must constantly be redefined, because, having it, we easily take it for granted. It does not mean freedom to do whatever we might feel like doing, but freedom to walk tall and without fear of persecution or repression. Countless people have suffered and died through lack of freedom and in their search for it. But some, having achieved the freedom to breath without restraint, then proceed to abuse it and engage in unlawful, antisocial and harmful activities, proving thereby that they are not ready for freedom. Those who sailed in *The Mayflower*, were happy to have escaped from the restrictions and religious persecution of the *Old World* to the *New*, but soon set about getting rid of the Indians in whose land they found themselves.



### WHY DO WE LEARN SO SLOWLY?

"That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons of history."

~ Aldous Huxley, 1894 - 1963,  
Critic & Novelist ~

The First World War was supposed to be 'the War to end all Wars', but was the precursor to another, even more-terrible war 20 years later, and an unending series of others since; in fact, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the bloodiest of all, and the 21<sup>st</sup> doesn't hold out much promise of being any better. Why do we learn so slowly? Do we really need the direct, personal experience to know how pain and loss feel? Is it impossible to learn from others? Why don't our leaders make a concerted effort to control violence? Must they wait until it happens to them, *personally*, before they will act, and lead us away from instead of into war?



## YOU DESERVE IT!

"Send someone a note that reads '*Congratulations*', and regardless of who he is, he'll think he has done something in the past week to deserve it."

~ Anonymous ~

Taken aback, many people would stutter, "*W-what f-for?*", but would secretly be quite excited, even though fearing some mistake. But really, are congratulations not in order? The very fact that we survive day by day, and wake up to another morning is a sign of success. Lots of people don't. If you're reading this, therefore, *Congratulations!*



### **ALAS, IT'S THERE IN US, TOO**

"If only it were all so simple, if only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being, and who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

~ Alexander Solzhenitsen, ex-Soviet Union  
Dissident Author, 1918 ~

The war on terrorism *is* terrorism (fighting fire with fire). Day by day, we see faces of innocent people who have lost loved ones in bombings and shootings. Does an Iraqi mother feel less pain than an American mother when her child dies? Can we write off the deaths as 'collateral damage' and still claim the moral high-ground? We have not outgrown barbarism; there are still elements of it in us.



## ADAPTING TO CHANGE

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one that is the most adaptable to change."

~ Charles Darwin, 1809 - 1882, British Naturalist ~

Change is the basic law of the Universe, no matter if we believe it or not, like it or not, want it or not. It is inexorable, and if we resist, we will be crushed. But have you noticed how much easier it is to adapt from not-having to having, than it is to have to learn to do without things we've known before? We are more adaptable in one way than the other. How do we feel, for example, when the computers we didn't have a few years ago, break down or otherwise cease to function?



## CONTRADICTION

We speak of the Here-and-Now and also of The *Way*, unaware of the inherent contradiction here.

A *Way* always leads somewhere, from A to B or here to there. But there is no way to get to where we already are.

We are putting off until the illusory future what can only be found or experienced *Now*. There is either a *Way*, or the Here-and-Now, not *both*.



## TOO MUCH TALK

"The *Ten Commandments* contain 297 words. *The Bill of Rights* is stated in 463 words. Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* contains 266 words. A federal directive to regulate the price of cabbage contains 26,911 words."

~ The Atlanta Journal ~

Our wonderful ability to read and write has led to excess verbiage, and we are bound with red-tape.

About 2,500 years ago, *Lao Tse* wrote, in the *Tao Te Ching*:

"More words count less."

If we do not know how to say clearly what we mean, we may easily get tangled up in words, when a few words might have done the job quite well.



## YES AND NO

"Reality is merely an illusion, albeit  
a very persistent one."

~ Albert Einstein ~

Well, because everything changes and  
doesn't last, it is, of course, an illusion.  
What is here now was not there before ~  
not exactly as it is now, at least ~ and nor  
will it be the same tomorrow. In context,  
however ~ that is, at the moment and by  
the moment ~ it is as real as the person  
who says it isn't real.

This is a table; there is no table. Both  
statements are true, but one is more true  
than the other, in that what we call a table  
changes, and before long becomes a not-  
table, and even at the moment, in terms of  
sub-atomic physics, the table dissolves  
and disappears.





**NO BEGINNING, NO END**

"The show's not over until the fat lady sings."

And obviously, the fat lady never gets to sing, because the show goes on and on, without end, and also without beginning. There is no final conclusion to anything, and always something before what was. Life is a process, causes producing effects, which in turn become fresh causes, and so on, forever. We may not always get what we want, but we *always* get something.



## LOSS AND GAIN

Loss is not something to be feared in advance but rather something to be expected, because sooner or later, everything that we have and are will be lost. Loss is just as much a part of life as gain, and merely to survive, day by day, something must be given up; we cannot run the race and expect to finish if our hands and arms are clutched full of things.



## **NOTHING IS FREE**

Consider that everything has a price, and when it's time to pay, you won't greatly mind. How much we get out of life depends upon how much we are prepared to pay ~ and not just in terms of money, either; money is not the only means of payment.

Sometimes we pay in advance for what we want, sometimes at the time, and sometimes after the event, but the most common form of payment is suffering.



## LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

"From their experience or from the recorded experience of others (history), men learn only what their passions and their metaphysical prejudices allow them to learn."

~ Aldous Huxley, 1894 - 1963, Critic & Novelist ~

Our likes and dislikes, preferences and predispositions, prevent us from learning from our experiences what might be learned; in the words of Simon and Garfunkel's old song, *The Boxer*, we "...see just what we want to see, and disregard the rest." Therefore, experience is less important than what we might learn from it; some people would learn much more than others from a similar experience; some people, like buffaloes, would learn almost nothing. And so, to say of someone: "He's had so much experience," might not mean as much as we take it to mean.



## CHANGING OUR MINDS

We are sometimes blamed for changing our minds, but it is our *prerogative* to do so; indeed, if our minds do not change, if we are holding onto the certainties of our youth, it means we are living in the past and have not grown at all. It is like insisting upon wearing the shoes we wore as children.



**SECURITY**

"The task we must set for ourselves  
is not to feel secure, but to be able  
to tolerate insecurity."

~ Erich Fromm, German-American  
Psychologist/Philosopher ~

Like a dewdrop on a lotus-leaf,  
life really is insecure, and our efforts  
to tie it down and secure it fail miserably.  
It is just something that we must accept  
and come to terms with: the fact of  
insecurity.



## PARTS OF THE WHOLE

"Whether we like it or not, we are important and, for better or worse, consciously or unconsciously, we will leave our mark on history. As the expression goes: "If not you, who? And if not now, when?"

~ M. Scott Peck, American Inspirational Writer ~

We feel ourselves unimportant because we think of ourselves in isolation, separate from the rest of existence, instead of seeing how we are connected and belong, as parts of the Whole. And when we think of ourselves as unimportant, we will live as so.

Even so, the high depends upon the low, and no-one does anything alone. We would not have heard of Alexander ~ known as '*the Great*' ~ for example,

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without the lowest of people under him  
~ cooks, cobblers, grass-cutters, grooms,  
blacksmiths, water-carriers, and so on,  
people who history never mentioned  
or acknowledged, but without whom,  
Alexander would also not have been  
heard of.





## WISH-FULFILLMENT

"It is not good for all our wishes to be filled. Through sickness we recognize the value of health; through evil, the value of good; through hunger, the value of food; through exertion, the value of rest."

~ Greek Saying ~

Our wishes seldom come true, and this is just as well, for we would lose our resilience and become soft if they did. Usually, we just have to come to terms with things as they are, and, if we don't like them, find a way around, through or over them. Life has always been like this, and there's no reason to suppose it will ever be any different. Magic wands are things from fairy-tales. Most of what we have has come about through work and struggle ~ on someone's part, if not our own ~ rather than by wishing and praying.



## **NATURE DOESN'T GIVE A DAMN!**

We often hear people say that things are sent to try us, but this is a self-centered way of looking at things. Is the cosmos so concerned about us that it arranges lessons for us to learn, or is it not that we sometimes see something to be learned from circumstances, particularly the unpleasant ones?

Events do not come labeled "Lesson for So-and-so"; nature doesn't give a damn whether we go the way of the dinosaurs or not.



## **GROWING UP OPEN-ENDED**

"I used to wonder what I would do when I grew up. Then, about seven years ago, I realized that I was never going to grow up ~ that growing up is an ongoing process."

~ M. Scott Peck, American Motivational Writer ~

We are often urged to 'grow up' and to 'act our age', which means not to act as a child. In trying to follow this advice, however, the natural curiosity and inquisitiveness of the child ~ not to mention the spontaneity and joy of life ~ in us is stifled and we try to become someone else. An image is projected for us to conform to, and, being unsure of ourselves or the process of nature, we allow others to manipulate and bend us to their purposes. Later on, if we are lucky, we may hear again the promptings of our hearts and realize that growth is open-ended and has no limits.



## **NO COMPULSION**

Although we may enforce compliance, we cannot force people to be our friends or believe us. Jesus told a rather strange parable that has sadly been used to force people to convert (Luke, 14: 16 - 24); it was about a rich man who sent out invitations to a feast he was preparing, but when the time came and the food was laid out, people made excuses for not coming. The man was not happy about this, and sent out his servants with the order to 'compel them to come in'. This parable hardly leaves room for any freedom; why should people attend if they don't want to? Compare this with the Buddha's invitation to "Come and See", and to "Test my teachings as a goldsmith would test gold." He didn't want people to merely believe and follow him, but to understand what he was trying to teach; there is quite a difference here.



## WHAT IS REAL?

Constantly, our senses are bombarded with impressions, many of which trigger memories which send us off all over the world and back into the past; truly, the speed of thought is fantastic! Instantly, a sight, a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch can bring to mind a person ~ a friend, a foe, or merely a stranger ~ who was part of our life years ago, or an event, an experience, a memory long filed away and seemingly forgotten in the mind. However can we complain of boredom when life is such an adventure? But then, you might say that such things are only memories, and not real. Not *real*? What *is* real? A dream, at the time, is as real to us as waking life when we wake up; when we dream, we think it is real. We should learn to watch and enjoy the comings and goings of things, because we cannot catch and hold life as a possession; it always slips through our fingers.



## THE DISEASE OF BOREDOM

"People of wealth and the so-called upper class suffer the most from boredom."

~ Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 - 1860),  
German Philosopher ~

Indeed, it is an affliction of the affluent, perhaps one of the prices we must pay for having the luxury of time. Not only that, but it's a communicable disease ~ that is, *dis-ease* ~ for it doesn't allow us to be comfortable or at ease. We can't imagine people in poor countries or places of great suffering and deprivation getting bored, as they have no time for that; each day for them is a matter of how to find enough to eat, and they have not much choice over that, as we do. Shall we change places with them? I don't think so.



## **THE LAUGHING BUDDHA**

Most people are familiar with the figure of the so-called '*Laughing Buddha*', which is supposed to represent the next Buddha, *Maitreya*, whose name means '*Loving-Kindness*'. He is not expected to appear for eons yet. The Teachings of Gotama Buddha are still with us.

Like most people, I suppose, I could not understand how a Buddha could be portrayed so *fat*. I reasoned that this is what happened when the concept of the future Buddha was carried from India (where the images show him as prince-like, majestic, handsome and well-proportioned), to China where the majority of people were so poor that, of necessity, they were skinny, and where only wealthy people could be well-padded. So, out of respect, they portrayed Maitreya as fat, with a tendency to put on more weight as time passed.

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Personally, I always found this portrayal rather gross until, some years ago, I heard an explanation as to why he is shown so (no-one knows what he will look like, of course; images come from our imagination, which is why they are called that). It is because he rejects no-one and nothing but accepts everything, and looks for ways to turn around and transform whatever is unpleasant or unworthy; he therefore has lots of material to work with.

With us, it is quite different. We are in the rejection-game. We don't like this, so we reject it; this is not nice, reject it; that's bad, reject this, too; and so on and so on until we have almost nothing left to work with. We want everything to be just so, to be exactly as we like it, and this is why we are so spiritually poor.

Things never *will* be exactly as we like them; life will never adapt to our likes and dislikes, our desires, hopes and fears. Somehow, we must find a way to adapt to

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life while still maintaining a balance. It is not easy ~ in fact, it's probably the hardest thing of all ~ but it can be done, and any success we might have will encourage us to go on and not give up.



## THE HABIT OF BEING LATE

"The trouble with being punctual is that people might think you have nothing more important to do."

~ Anonymous ~

This seems to be the case with great numbers of people. Or can there be *another* reason for people habitually turning up late? ~ and we all know people who do. Whether it is true or not, I can't say, but I once heard that some people deliberately come late in order to show their importance and to get a kick out of making others wait. This is very rude if it is so, and an extra reason for them to make an effort to be punctual. The Golden Rule is applicable here: Do not do to others what you do not like others to do to you. We do not like others to keep us waiting, and so we should consider how others feel if we keep them waiting. It's a matter of common courtesy, and is quite simple; all we have to do is think!



## WITH THE HELP OF COUNTLESS OTHERS

"Don't ask me who's influenced me.  
A lion is made up of the lambs he's  
digested, and I've been reading all  
my life."

~ Giorgos Seferis (1900 -1971), Greek Nobel  
Literature Prize Winner 1963 ~

Our story is not simply *our* story, but is  
made up of the stories of countless other  
people and things; there is very little about  
us that is really *us*. Most of us is *not-us*!

It is said that the first person the Buddha  
met after he set out from the place of his  
enlightenment to go to Benares, was a  
wandering ascetic named Upaka. This ascetic  
was so impressed by the appearance and  
demeanor of the Buddha that he said to him:

"Your appearance, friend, is remarkable;  
you must surely have found something  
extraordinary. May I ask who is your teacher  
and what he teaches?" The Buddha replied:

"I have no

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teacher. By myself I have become a Buddha." Upaka was not impressed and thought he was boasting ~ something not rare even in those times ~ and said, "It may be so", and walked away without waiting to hear anything more. Perhaps I would have done the same, especially because there are so many people claiming to be Buddhas these days.

It is doubtful that the Buddha really said that ~ the scriptures should not be considered infallible ~ because no-one does anything by themselves, but only with the help and support of countless others, all in accord with the Law of Cause-and-Effect. The Buddha may not have had a teacher to lead him to enlightenment, but many people *did* help him during his search, without whom, he would not ~ *could* not ~ have made it. Having a teacher is only one of the factors involved, and a teacher may help us only if we have other good supporting factors.

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Actually, anyone or anything that even momentarily crosses our path or impinges on our senses influences us in some way, usually without us being aware of it. It is the pinnacle of arrogance and not just ignorance to imagine that we are complete in ourselves and accomplish anything alone.



**WHEN WE ARE MORE MATURE AS A SPECIES**

"I believe it would be considerably healthier for us to dare to live without a reason for many things than with reasons that are simplistic."

~ M. Scott Peck, American Inspirational Writer ~

And how more simplistic can you get than to believe that if you kill and die for your religion, you will go immediately to Heaven? Without such a belief, suicide-bombers ~ *misguided missiles* ~ would think twice before doing what they do; their beliefs are the reason for their actions. Religion often makes people worse instead of better?

In the future, when we have matured more religions that teach and instill hatred will be made illegal, and we will be taught and helped to understand, *in school*, that we should do what is right simply because it's

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the right thing to do, and not with the idea of getting something back later on; we will be taught to accept responsibility for whatever we choose to do, without blaming others.



## CHEAP COMFORT

"Never does one feel so utterly helpless as in trying to speak comfort for great bereavement. I will not try it. Time is the only comforter for the loss of a mother."

~ Jane Welsh Carlyle (1801 - 1866), Scottish Essayist ~

Unless we are prepared for it by long and deep reflection, the death of a loved one is so traumatic that bereaved people are often numb with pain and impervious to even the best-meant advice. Very few people are like the philosopher Chuang Tze who, when a friend visited to offer his condolences after his wife died, was found singing and beating a drum. Asked the reason for his unseemly behavior, Chuang Tse replied that since no amount of grief would ever bring his wife back, he might as well cheer himself up by singing rather than being sad. This is the fortitude that

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comes from insight, but it is rare.

Beware of offering cheap words of consolation, which may sound callous and cruel in such situations. This doesn't mean there is nothing we can do, however; far from it. If you know the bereaved well enough, go to her/his home, and without asking if there is anything you might do, do something that needs doing; make tea, cook a meal, tidy up a little, feed the animals, vacuum the house, water the garden ~ things that your friend might not have the energy to do; show that you care; there's no need to say anything; just be there, a friend in time of need. My mother always used to say "A little bit of help is worth a lot of pity", meaning hands-on speaks louder than words.



## NOT A PERSONALITY-CULT

To the seeker after Truth it is immaterial where an idea comes from. The source and development of an idea is a matter for the academic. In fact, in order to understand Truth, it is not necessary even to know whether the teaching comes from the Buddha, or from anyone else. What is essential is seeing and understanding it. There is a story in the *Majjhima-Nikaya* (*Sutta* No. 140) which illustrates this.

The Buddha once spent a night in a potter's shed. In the same shed there was a young recluse who had arrived there earlier. They did not know each other. The Buddha observed the recluse, and thought to himself: 'Pleasant are the ways of this young man. It would be good if I should ask about him'. So the Buddha asked him: 'O monk, in whose name have you left home? Who is your master? Whose doctrine do you like?'

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'O friend,' answered the young man, 'there is the recluse Gotama, who left the Sakya-family to become a recluse. There is high repute abroad of him that he is an *Arahant*, a Fully-Enlightened One. In the name of that Blessed One I have become a recluse. He is my Master, and I like his doctrine.'

'Where does that Blessed One, the Arahant, the Fully-Enlightened One live at the present time?'

'In the countries to the north, friend, there is a city called Savatthi. It is there that that Blessed One, the Arahant, the Fully-Enlightened One, is now living.'

'Have you ever seen him, that Blessed One? Would you recognize him if you saw him?'

'I have never seen that Blessed One. Nor should I recognize him if I saw him.'

The Buddha realized that it was in his name that this unknown young man had

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left home and become a recluse. But without divulging his own identity, he said: 'O monk, I will teach you the doctrine. Listen and pay attention. I will speak.'

'Very well, friend,' said the young man in assent.

Then the Buddha delivered to this young man a most remarkable discourse explaining Truth. It was only at the end of this discourse that this young recluse, whose name was *Pukkusati*, realized that the person who spoke to him was the Buddha himself. So he got up, went before the Buddha, bowed down at the feet of the Master, and apologized to him for calling him 'friend' unknowingly. He then begged the Buddha to ordain him and admit him into the Order."

~ Extracted from "*What The Buddha Taught*," by Ven. Walpola Rahula ~

It is clear from this that the Buddha did not look too extraordinary, such as many

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people believe, and as he is represented in most images and pictures. It is also clear that Buddhism is not a personality-cult, with the Buddha at the center.



## **SEE WHAT IT IMPLIES**

We see now another attempt by nuclear-neighbors India and Pakistan to patch up their differences, and not before time, but it will be very difficult if each continues to hold onto its position uncompromisingly.

The Indians should know this better than anyone, as they ~ the Hindus among them, at least ~ have the benefit of the concept of reincarnation, which the Pakistanis, as Muslims, do not. This concept should make people more flexible and less dogmatic, but only if they investigate it to see what it implies, not by merely believing it.

If we cling onto the idea of nationality, as we do ~ *us* against *them* ~ problems will always result, distrust, fear and hatred continually arise. But if we are willing to open our minds and push back our horizons, and consider that this might

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not be our one-and-only life, and that, as the concept of reincarnation holds, we have lived many times before and in all probability will live many times again, something will change. We become able to face the possibility that in the next or another life, we might be born as a member of a tribe or nation that at present we abhor, and will look at things in quite a different way. If an Indian might become a Pakistani, a Palestinian an Israeli, an American an Iraqi, and so on, we might pause before acting in aggressive ways. Dare we say it would never happen? Are we so confident it would not? Here is one tool to help us deal with the hatred and violence in the world ~ a much better tool than the belief in a single life on earth and an eternity in either heaven or hell after it, which is actually one of the main causes of conflict ~ the belief that we are somehow *chosen*, while others are not.



### THE TREASURE OF A FRIEND

"The proper office of a friend is to side with you when you are in the wrong. Nearly anybody will side with you when you are in the right."

~ Unknown ~

A friend does not have to agree with everything we do or say, and sometimes, he may strongly disagree, but he stands by us nevertheless. He will not hear things said about us that are malicious or untrue, but will come to our defense. He may gently advise or counsel us, but never with the intention to hurt us. He is there not only in the good times, but also in the bad. If we have such a friend, we are fortunate indeed; most people don't, and neither are they such a friend to others.





## FRIENDS

"Often, we have no time for our friends but all the time in the world for our enemies."

~ Leon Uris (1924 - 2003),  
American best-selling Author ~

Although we might have little time for our friends, we somehow seem to find time for our enemies; perhaps this is necessary, to fend them off or protect ourselves, but the cultivation of friends is even more important, as they form a big part of our defenses.

It is easy to get caught up in things and become so busy that we forget our friends and lose touch with them, thinking we can take them up again ~ like an article of clothing ~ whenever we like. But this is not the way to treat friends, because friends, like everything else ~ including ourselves ~ change, and if friendship is not maintained, it may cool and become

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beyond resuscitation. Don't think, in your busy-ness, that you need no friends, for the time may well come when you *will* need them, but if you neglect or cast them aside, they might not be there.



### DO WHAT YOU WANT, BUT....

Unable to achieve their aims in an open and straightforward manner, cowards resort to anonymous terror. There is nothing brave or heroic about this; it is simply despicable.

Again, this can be laid at the door of our education-systems world-wide. Clearly, they have failed, cheated and robbed us by emphasizing academic success instead of character-development. If we'd been taught to be honest about what we do instead of cunning and calculative, we would not try to cover up and lie about our actions. We need to be instructed in courage, not cowardice. The suicide-bomber is not courageous, but cowardly; he strikes the innocent without warning. Would *he* like someone to do that to *his* family and friends? Do what you like, but be prepared to account for your actions if and when called upon to do so.



## OPPOSITION

"The conservative who resists change is as valuable as the radical who proposes it ~ perhaps as much more valuable as roots are more vital than grafts. It is good that new ideas should be heard, for the sake of the few that can be used; but it is also good that new Ideas should be compelled to go through the mill of objection, opposition, and contumely; this is the trial heat which innovations must survive before being allowed to enter the human race. It is good that the old should resist the young, and that the young should prod the old; out of this tension, as out of the strife of the sexes and the classes, comes a creative tensile strength, stimulated development, a secret and basic unity and movement of the whole."

~ Will Durant: *'The Lessons of History'* ~



## **“MINE’S BETTER THAN YOURS”**

"The manner in which the Israelites carried the ark of the covenant with them during their travels in the wilderness had a little of the flavor of carrying God with them. Otherwise, one suspects, they might have felt it necessary always to travel back to Sinai to commune with Him.

"In the religious thought of the day, there was no necessary feeling of antagonism towards the gods of other tribes, provided no actual war was going on and the enemy was not calling upon his god for help in your destruction (as you were calling upon yours for help in his). The situation might be much the same as in our own feeling for the flags of foreign nations. If we are at peace with a foreign nation, international usage requires that we treat its flag with decent respect even in our own land. It would be even more a

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matter of elementary courtesy to treat the flag of a foreign nation with respect while inside the borders of that nation.

"In later times, however, as a consciousness of the universality of Yahveh grew among the Israelites, and as the feeling deepened that there was only one God, not only for the Israelites but for the whole world ~ that there was one *only* God ~ the attitude of the Yahvists towards the gods of other tribes hardened. The foreign gods were not only potential enemies; they were not gods at all. At most, they were demons who imposed their worship on the ignorant, unenlightened, or wicked."

~ Isaac Asimov: *Asimov's Guide to the Bible* ~

And it has gone on ever since, causing so much trouble in the world. This pernicious belief must be challenged; proof of this God must be demanded and required; let's pull its teeth!



## **MORALITY ON A FIRM FOUNDATION**

“To rest morality upon religious beliefs is a risky procedure, for such beliefs are subject to change, and their fall may damage the moral code allied with them.

“Everyone who has discovered the weakness or falsity of the evidence upon which his religion is based .... will be tempted to believe that the morality is as chimerical as the religion it is founded upon. This is how it is that the words *infidel* and *libertine* have become synonymous.

“There would be no such disadvantage if a natural morality were taught instead of a theological. Instead of prohibiting debauchery, crime and vice because God and religion forbid them, we ought to say that all excess is harmful to man’s conservation, makes him despicable in the eyes of society, is forbidden by reason

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..... and is forbidden by nature, which wants him to work for his lasting happiness”.

~ Baron d’Holbach, French philosopher, 1723-1789, extracted from *The Age of Voltaire*, by Will Durant ~

We can tell children that if they are good, we will give them a candy, but if they’re naughty, we will spank them, and such a technique might have the desired result of persuading the kids to behave. But tell a grown man the same thing and see what will happen. We must appeal to people’s sense of responsibility and reason; many people no longer believe in heaven and hell, so to hold out such inducements will have little effect. Things should follow on from Right Understanding.





## **NO ACCIDENTS**

"Everything that happens happens exactly as it should. Observe things carefully over time, and you will surely experience this to be so."

~ Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Roman Emperor  
and Stoic Philosopher ~

The Universe is governed by the overall Law of Cause-and-Effect. Nothing comes from nothing, and there are no accidents; what we call accidents are not accidents at all, but effects of certain causes, some of which we can observe, and others which are hidden from us, like the roots of a tree below ground; just because we do not see the roots, it doesn't mean they're not there.

Neither are things pre-determined or fated to be. Things unfold, and even a tiny, seemingly-insignificant event, can change the direction completely.

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Remember the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo in 1914: it wasn't a small matter for him, of course, but as far as most people were concerned, it was unplanned and unexpected, yet it plunged virtually the whole world into the terrible war of 1914 -1918, involving everyone.

Somehow, because we are parts of the Whole, we are all involved in everything, and often seem to be victims of events, as many things happen which we do not like or want. Even so, we have some choice over how we will respond. We are not completely helpless, like dumb animals, bound and gagged on some sacrificial altar of fate! The present is the result of the past, but the future is not fixed.

Life is like a play  
In which we are all actors,  
But the script is written as we act,  
not before,  
And no-one knows what will happen next.



### **NOT KNOWN IN ADVANCE**

“An adventure is going into the unknown. If you know exactly where you are going, exactly how you will get there, and exactly what you will see along the way, it is not an adventure...

Because they involve the unknown, adventures are inherently dangerous to a greater or lesser degree. Yet it is also only from adventures and their newness that we learn. If we know exactly where we're going, exactly how to get there, and exactly what we'll see along the way, we won't learn anything.”

~ M. Scott Peck ~

Life, moment by moment, is uncharted territory; no-one's been there before. We shouldn't approach it with minds fully made up.



### NEARER OUR TIME, BUT EVEN SO.....

Compared with the scriptures of the various religions, the writings of Shakespeare are not only much nearer our time, but much better known. Few people are well-versed in the scriptures of the religion they profess to believe.

Here, to demonstrate how it is so easy to misunderstand the written word, is the famous quotation from *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, Scene 2:

*“O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou  
Romeo?”*

This is often taken to mean, “Where are you, Romeo?” but in actual fact, spoken in anguish, it means, “Why do you have to be Romeo? Why can’t you be someone else?”

As an experiment to illustrate the difference between reading and hearing

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what is written, I have sometimes asked someone in my audience to read out a passage from one of my books, and have then read out the same passage. You can be sure that the two readings are quite different, as the other person could not possibly know how I wrote that, what was in my mind at the time, could not gauge the nuances, the stresses, the pauses; there would not be the same feeling. Likewise, when we read the scriptures, how can we tell how they were written? We would need a brilliant imagination, but in this, there is always room for error. It is a greater error, however, to simply assume that what is written in a book ~ *any* book ~ must be true. We cannot say a thing is true unless we have experienced it ourselves. Until then, it is only ink on paper!



## MANY STAGES

“In the early stages, we move like cattle, in herds; later, we congregate in religions, movements, and societies; later, we advance in groups which grow ever smaller; finally, we advance alone”.

~ Christmas Humphries ~

One day, all we are presently going through will make sense, though it may seem meaningless now. In one way, we are always alone, but in another way, never so. Spiritual progress is gradual, but the breakthrough to enlightenment, when it comes, will be sudden. We must all undergo periods of suffering, sometimes very intense. But later, we will probably see that something good has come of it. This doesn't mean we should go in search of suffering, however, but to see things as they arise. Remember: All things change; nothing lasts forever.



## **GOOD IN EVERYTHING**

Like the moon, which has no light of its own, but mirrors the sun, so everything reflects and echoes Dharma; everything and everyone has Dharma-lessons to impart, even if they are unaware of it.

In Shakespeare's play, *As You like It*, a Duke whose realm has been usurped by his brother, and who now resides in a forest, instead of feeling resentment at his condition, speaks of it so:

"Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,  
hath not old custom made this life more  
sweet than that of painted pomp? Are not  
these woods more free of peril than the  
envious court?"

Here feel we not the penalty of Adam;  
the seasons' difference, as the icy fang  
and churlish chiding of the winter's wind,  
which, when it bites and blows upon my  
body even till I shrink with cold, I smile

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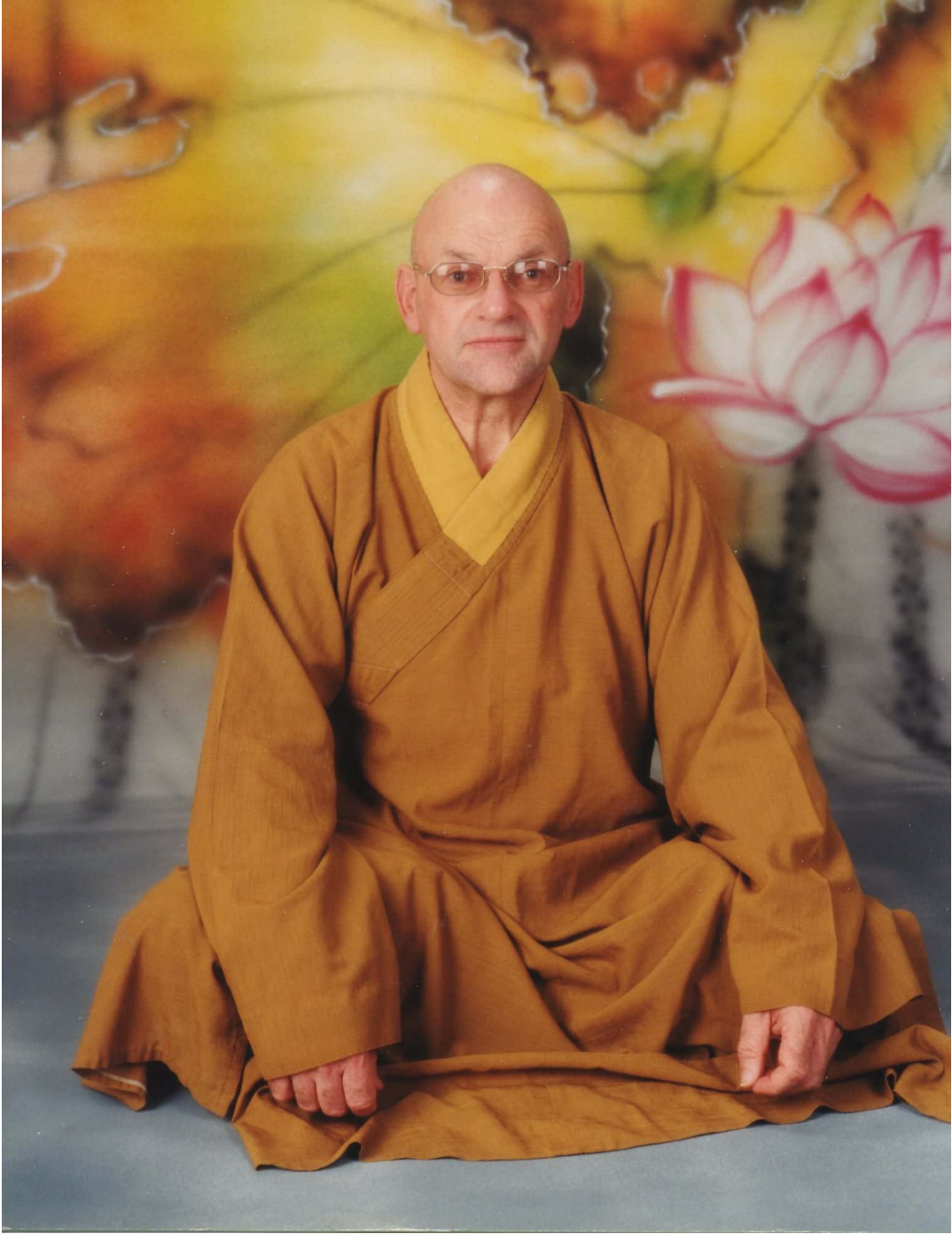
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and say 'this is no flattery; these are counselors that feelingly persuade me what I am'. In plainer and less-poetic English he is saying that, having grown used to the simplicity of life in the forest, he finds it more agreeable than restricted and formal court-life ~ and less dangerous, too; it is not a loss, like Adam's loss of Eden, but a gain. The changing seasons and weather do not lie, like flatterers, but serve as reminders of our frailty. Adversity, though unpleasant, has lessons in its hands (like the toad, which was commonly believed to have a jewel in its ugly head). And so, living far from complicated society, it is easy to perceive Dharma all around.

Seen in this way, therefore, it is not appropriate to ask "Who is your teacher?" But, since such a question is often asked, the only answer would be:  
"Who is *not* my teacher?"

?







We are victims ~ victims of the past, for this is where our superstitions, ignorance, prejudice, beliefs and wrong ideas came from, as we would see if we cared to think about it.

They came from the past, like most of the things that we have and are; they became 'ours' by default, and we seldom, if ever, question or think of them. We didn't want them or choose them, but if challenged about them, we become defensive, considering them ours. We drank them in with our mother's milk, and will remain their hosts and means of expression unless and until we start to question them. When this happens, we will find that we have more freedom than we knew before, and ready to begin a journey of endless discovery. It is for the brave, not the fainthearted.

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