

## THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Who are you?

A man who had been practising meditation for many years, and who'd experienced a host of cosmic experiences went to a famous master for confirmation of his spiritual achievement. The master said "sit down, I'd like to ask you a few questions first."

"Who are you?" asked the master.

"My name is William," replied the man.

"I didn't ask your name, but who you are," said the master.

"I'm British," replied the man.

"I didn't ask your nationality, but who you are," replied the master.

"I'm a husband and father of two sons."

"I didn't ask whether you are a father or not, but who you are."

"I'm an architect."

"I didn't ask what your profession is, but who you are."

"I'm a Buddhist." And on and on it went.

"Who are you?"

"In my spare time I help the poor and needy."

"I didn't ask about your spare time, but who you are."

"I'm a meditator."

This went on and on no matter how many times he was asked he couldn't see the master's point.

The master finally says, "When you know your appearance from who you really are, come back."

What is the ultimate purpose of the Dharma, of spiritual practice? In my opinion it is to wake up who we really are and to free us from suffering. This is I believe is

the heart of the matter, it's what all those hours of meditation and being aware are really about. It's what the Buddha and all the other great spiritual teachers were pointing to.

For a few rare individuals this waking up to who they are happens spontaneously. Their true nature (Buddha nature, God, The Beloved whatever we wish to call it) bursts forth and shows itself for what it really is, seemingly without any effort on the individual's behalf. However for most of us who want to wake up, who want to be free and happy it is not so simple. We need to put forth some effort, we need to engage in some form of intelligent spiritual practice, we need to engage in some form of meditation. By meditation I don't mean a technique to achieve something, but simply the art of being aware. Because it is through awareness that we free our selves from the misery that can be our lives.

The root of our suffering is a sense of separate self, a sense of me being separate from all the other mes out there. Over the years of growing up and becoming an adult we build an identity out of this sense of self, like the man in the story on the opposite page. We then lose contact with our true nature. This sense of self, which in some cases can be very constricted, then becomes our prison. What we normally do at this point is to try and decorate the prison, to make it cosy and a nice place to live in. This is the area of self-development.

Self-development isn't what meditation is really about. Awareness practice (meditation) is seeing what imprisons us, it's about studying the walls of the prison for a way out of it completely. Never mind tinkering with the place, never mind repainting the walls, never mind putting up some fancy new curtains, or polishing the furniture it's about finding a way out of prison altogether.

What we don't actually realise is that we are already free. We are already happy and free and we don't even know it. We don't experience it because our minds are confused. We spend nearly all our time preoccupied by the machinations and demands of the ego, of the sense of this separate me. This sense of a separate me is actually just a story we tell our selves, it makes us feel both real and very important. But it is also the root cause of all our suffering.

Of course we are separate too and that is not to be denied. This experience of our self as separate from others is in some cases so strong and habitual that we may not even begin to think that the reality of the situation could be different. However, if you're reading this then you have at least a sense that there's more to this life than this sense of separation, than being in prison.

The way out of the prison is not to deny that we are separate individuals but it's seeing that the experience of separation is not the whole picture. As well as experiencing the diversity of life, experiencing the difference between us, we need to see the underlying unity too.

How is this realised? How do we free our selves from this self made prison?

On this front we have good news. We don't need to do anything, we don't need to add anything onto who we are. We don't need to develop any special qualities, or to engage in trying to endlessly change ourselves into somebody else. What we do need to do is to be aware. And what we need to be aware of is the thinking mind that is running the show. What we need to do is to watch, to observe the endless games of our slippery minds.

As we watch our mind we will notice we are telling ourselves stories all day long. These stories are ways that the self, the sense of me reinforces itself.

One way that the self reinforces itself is through judging others. When we judge others we either feel superior or inferior, either way there's a strong sense of me there, as separate from other people. What we judge we cannot understand, we distance our selves from what is judged.

Another way the self reinforces itself is through comparison. The self cannot see differences without comparing as better or worse, again reinforcing itself as different from.

The self doesn't like uncertainty. It would rather create a story that causes us to suffer than be in a space of unknowing. Like the Mother who was very upset by the actions of her son. Every time they went out together he would walk a few yards ahead of her. "He's ashamed of me, he's ashamed of me," she would cry. Anyway, this went on and on, until one day she plucked up the courage to ask him about it. "Daniel, I'm so upset with you, every time we go out you walk ahead of me, you're ashamed of me aren't you." "Oh mum no, no, it's not that, it's because you're so beautiful and young looking that I don't want my friends thinking I've another girlfriend."

Imagine how she felt when her son says this to her, saying she's beautiful.

See how the mind creates a story that causes suffering rather than being in the space of unknowing. The mind needs to know, if it doesn't it will make up a story whether it leads to suffering or not.

The self constantly needs to be affirmed. It needs approval, it needs its fix of appreciation, approval, and to be noticed in a good light.

When you go through the day notice how many times you want to be noticed. Notice how many times you want to be seen to be special in some way. Notice your assumptions about others and life in general. Notice how you act to please others quite often at the expense of what you really want to do. Notice when you want to say no, but end up saying yes instead. A sign that we are waking up is being able to say no.

Notice what it feels like the next time you are praised or criticised. The elation you feel when praised is setting you up for feeling depressed when criticised. Notice how much you blame others for how you feel.

These are all ways that we give our power away and let other people dictate how we feel. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be free and not have to constantly seek approval from others? Wouldn't it be wonderful to not have to constantly be seeking others' permission to feel okay?

Observe all this as non-judgementally as possible. If you do judge then that too can simply be noticed. Observe all this without trying to change anything at all about yourself. What we can so easily get into is to try and change our experience into what we think it should, rather than understanding our experience as it is. Do this and watch the change in you occur quite naturally, you don't have to try and change but change will happen through awareness.

As we pay attention in this way we will notice that all the demands of the ego, all the judging and blaming begin to weaken. We find our selves experiencing more peace, more freedom and happiness. We find our selves relaxing into the openness that is the our true nature.

All this happens not because we have added anything, or because we have acquired happiness, as it cannot be acquired, but because that which causes us to suffer has started to fall away.

And what's there when the self has been seen for what it is, when we're not caught up with the screaming ego? Freedom and happiness that's what we discover, and we see that they were there all the time and which is our birthright.

Written by Suryacitta