



BIRTH IS PAINFUL

A basic understanding of Buddhism is that there are four fundamentally painful, anxiety-producing, disconcerting experiences in human life. The four are birth, aging, sickness and death. In an unawakened state, these four experiences are characterized by Dukkha, lit. “painful, dislocated, off-center, friction causing”.

But why is birth so painful. Physical birth is the classic metaphor. The world of the baby in the womb and the new world it enters into from the womb could not be more different. There is seemingly nothing that would prepare the baby for the world it is about to enter. Thus the miracle of birth is accompanied by crying and having to learn an entirely new way of living. Any birth experience following this has this basic programming of fear, anxiety, and trembling over any new experience, any new birth.

Living in the ever-changing present is deeply anxiety-provoking to a mind set on being in control of his environment. This is true not only for individuals but for institutions as well, political and religious institutions in particular. The reality of constant change, revolutionary or evolutionary, is a given in Buddhism. There can be no permanent, unchanging entity, from a creator god to an individual soul. Buddhism includes itself as also subject to birth, old age, sickness, and death. If this is so, then all the so-called eternal verities are only temporarily or conveniently real. They may be useful, or even important for functioning, but are basically without abiding substance. It is like the four directions of north, south, east and west – useful ideas for getting around but having no reality in and of themselves. Leave the earth and the four

directions have no meaning. In the same way, describe yourself without its relation to its surroundings and other beings in it and you end up with gibberish. Our anxiety when encountering new experiences testify to our need to accumulate static realities, our need to have things go as we have determined they should go.

Adapting to change however, is not as simple as it first seems. Change for the sake of change is also spurred on by the need to be in control. I don't like what others have done over the centuries, I need to do it on my own terms and in my own way. This kind of thinking is not conducive to consensus nor does it value consensus. On the contrary, it values and accepts the idea of "real leaders" and the rest as followers. It is the attitude of special experts, of gifted people, and the rest of humanity as so much chattel. Shotoku Taishi's view of us all as being both wise and foolish, good and evil, right and wrong, life a ring which has no end, would not be highly regarded by this group.



Finally, whether you are for change, or not for change, change takes place, and never in exactly the way you want it to. To be human is to be a control freak, and this whether or not you fancy yourself as regimented or a free spirit. The moments in which the conscious or unconscious need to be in control is forgotten or let go, is the moment of the effortless now – and now is forever. Visiting the now, or having the now visit you is everything. Don't regret or resist having to return to the ego-self world though, that is a given. It is after all what a Bodhisattva does.

Namoamidabutsu,
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