

## Refuge from The Worldly Winds

Jon Yaffe – March, 2019

“THE LEVEL OF WORDS - Rumi

God has said, "The images that come with human language do not correspond to me,

but those who love words must use them to come near."

Just remember, it's like saying of the king, "He is not a weaver." Is that praise?

Whatever such a statement is, words are on THAT level of God-knowing.”

We never know how typical our experiences are, but I for one see a world spinning around me in confounding agitation, rife with suffering; the bulk of it man-made. I'm not discounting or ignoring the great beauty around us, especially that of the natural world – it most certainly is Spring, after all - but there is an abundance of crazy out there.

My practice and the karma accrued from making better choices as I've gotten older afford me quite a bit of peace, but there are many times I feel I live in the relative calm of the eye of the storm, with destructive winds raging around me.

The Buddha observed much of the same, and of course pointed out the nature of these winds. In the Lokavipatti Sutta (The Failings of the World), he offered a teaching that's come to be known as the 8 Worldly Winds. And I'd like to begin this talk by sharing some of this with you. (Note that I'm condensing and paraphrasing slightly)

"Monks, these eight worldly conditions spin after the world, and the world spins after these eight worldly conditions. Which eight? Gain, loss, status, disgrace, censure, praise, pleasure & pain. These are the eight worldly conditions that spin after the world, and the world spins after these eight worldly conditions.

For an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person [these conditions arise].... For a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones [these conditional also arise]... So what difference, ... what distinguishing factor is there between the well-instructed disciple ... and the uninstructed.... person?"

... The Blessed One said, "Gain arises for an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person. He does not reflect, 'Gain has arisen for me. It is inconstant, stressful, & subject to change.' He does not discern it as it actually is." ... "His mind remains consumed with the gain. ... [and so forth, for all the others]

"He welcomes the arisen gain and rebels against the arisen loss. He welcomes the arisen status and rebels against the arisen disgrace. ... [and so forth, for all the others] ... As he is thus engaged in welcoming & rebelling, he is not released from birth, aging, or death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, or

despairs. He is not released, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

"Now, gain arises for a well-instructed [one]. He reflects, 'Gain has arisen for me. It is inconstant, stressful, & subject to change.' He discerns it as it actually is. [and so forth, for all the others] "His mind does not remain consumed with the gain. His mind does not remain consumed with the loss... [and so forth, for all the others] "He does not welcome the arisen gain, or rebel against the arisen loss. He does not welcome the arisen status, or rebel against the arisen disgrace. He does not welcome the arisen praise, or rebel against the arisen censure. He does not welcome the arisen pleasure, or rebel against the arisen pain. As he thus abandons welcoming & rebelling, he is released from birth, aging, & death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, & despairs. He is released, I tell you, from suffering & stress.

"This is the difference, this the distinction, this the distinguishing factor between the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones and the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person."

Definition - Gain, loss, status, disgrace, censure, praise, pleasure, & pain

- Key ideas in the sutta
  - These arise for all – the wise and skillful as well the unwise & unskillful
  - They are impermanent, suffering, impersonal
    - The unwise fail to see these underlying traits, and thus get caught in reactivity
      - Since half of these are at least superficially pleasant – especially in the short run – they appeal to craving, these can be “charming” and seductive.
      - Half are at least superficially unpleasant, and we often react to them with aversion, organizing our lives to avoid or overcome them.
        - It may be worth pointing out that for various reasons – neuroses or the influence of messages from other individuals or society, we may put a reverse spin on these. Obsessed ascetics may take pride in self-punishing or self-denying behavior. Or, at the other extreme, we may buy into the idea that “whatever doesn’t kill me makes me stronger.” Even when we recognize misery as misery, various attachments can make it challenging to leave unwholesome situations, settings or people:
          - Familiarity
          - Loyalty

- Simple dependency

I point this out to say that it may be hard to predict the flavor of our reactivity, and the causes and conditions which trigger it – you and I may find different winds especially challenging - but the process – the tendency to react unskillfully - is the same, even if the content and specifics are different.

At any rate, the wise see the underlying nature of the 8WWs, and don't get caught up by them; or if they do momentarily, they learn how and where to take shelter.

- If you have difficulty recognizing when you are being reactive, learn to look to the body for clues. If something happens – either externally or internally – and you feel yourself growing tense or constricted, if you feel energy swelling or fading, and especially if you feel yourself leaning in or pulling back, these are good indicators of reactivity.
- In performing due diligence on this subject, I came across a Tricycle article “How Parents and Children Can Learn Balance and Equanimity from the Eight Worldly Winds”. Without digging into the specifics, it made a good point that we don’t often consider (though it’s obvious, when you think about it – that the 8WWs effect those around us as well as ourselves - close-by loved ones and distant ones (Boeing?).
  - Because of this, some of the dukkha we feel arises out of our concern for others; and the impact of their actions, sometimes indirect but easily experienced as personal, on us, themselves and other others. It's bad enough that we are directly impacted by the 8WWs; it may feel doubly unfair that we can be other people's collateral damage. That’s just plain rude!
  - This can be a real challenge to both our sila – our morality - and our wisdom. We may have progressed far enough on the path that we conduct ourselves scrupulously, but how do we act when caught in the bind where our honesty and truthfulness might expose another's lies or misconduct? Do we pop our kids’ balloons? Do we expose the lies of our spouse or dearest friend? When does being supportive slide down the slippery slope and turn into enabling? Taking a list from metta practice, do we make the same judgment call independent of whether the “offending party” is a mentor, loved-one, close friend, casual acquaintance, or enemy? There can be a real rub between our ethics and our concern for others; and between our personal progress and our willingness to let others come to their own senses and develop wisdom at their own pace, when we see them harming themselves or others. We can live in the relative calm of the eye of the storm, and still be pained by appreciating the storm's impact on others.

- Thinking of these winds as a storm, a gale, a hurricane, a tornado – and considering the idea that the arising of these is an unavoidable aspect of life, leads us to extend the metaphor and consider the idea of how to stay out of the worst of its path, how to seek and find refuge – shelter from the storm.
- When we consider the idea of shelter or refuge, we come to a complementary teaching: that of the Triple Gem. Buddhism uses the metaphor of jewels to suggest preciousness and value, and the three gems are The Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. The metaphor becomes mixed, when we speak of going to, or embracing, these “gems” as offering a refuge – something to which we turn to provide shelter from the storm the 8WWs comprise.

- Indeed, we begin each of our sittings by chanting

Buddham saranam gacchāmi	I go to the Buddha for refuge
Dhammam saranam gacchāmi	I go to the Dhamma for refuge
Sangham saranam gacchāmi	I go to the Sangha for refuge

Repeat these lines, preceded by...

Dutiyampi (all the above)

Tatiyampi (all the above)

A second time...

A third time...

- Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha of course refer to three different things, and they refer to them using the very briefest of terms, with no attached elaboration. So, we'll look at each of these a bit, recognizing that like jewels each may have multiple facets, each considering. And, being different it may be that each offers us something of value different from the others. If this is true, then perhaps each may offer us a different category of refuge or protection. Each may be valuable to us in different, ideally complementary ways.
- SO - Who/What do we refer to as the Buddha, and in what way or ways is he available for us to take refuge in him/it?
  - There was the historical Buddha – a human being not a deity.
    - As a human, and not a God, we **cannot** take refuge in deistic religious practice. We may appropriately venerate the Buddha, but we do not worship him. His being is not a continuing or eternal external presence, which we supplicate or obey because of his power, promised gifts (should we please him) or due to fearing his wrath, should we fail to do so. He was not, nor were he alive today would he be, all powerful. If he were here today, he most likely would tell us what he told his followers when he was on his death-bed: heed the dharma and commit ourselves to do the ongoing work of reflection and practice necessary to put it to work in our lives and in the world.

- As a human being, he accomplished three things which qualify him as a Buddha – he found the path to liberation on his own (as opposed to journeying upon a path delineated by others), he codified and taught that path (Buddha Dharma) to others (creating a means by which others might be liberated), and lastly created an enduring institution (the noble and monastic sanghas) to maintain this precious body of knowledge and continue offering it others; to perpetuate path knowledge “for a long time”.
- Because he did these things, we *can* be *grateful* to the historical Buddha, for having accomplished these, all of which, with study and effort, can benefit us. We can embrace and appreciate his role as benefactor, improving the lives of literally millions of persons over thousands of years. In essence, he lit a light 2600 years ago, that still burns brightly, and which our actions help validate and continue to fuel. Gratitude is a wholesome state of mind, which displaces unwholesome states of mind, such as the craving and aversion invoked by the 8WWs. Gratitude is an attitude comprising a simple, but effective and sweet refuge.
- We are human too, and as humans the Buddha’s accomplishments speak to *our* potential. We may be humbled by his attainments and forego competing with him, but we don't have to succeed from scratch as he did. We have the dhamma and sangha to guide and support our journey, and if he can attain liberation from scratch, surely we can make a stab at it using proven guides and supports. The Buddha's humanity, rather than being a shortcoming, is rightly seen as an inspiration. My inner IT project manager asserts The Buddha’s humanity is not a bug, it is a feature!
- As a final consideration, TNH adds a spiritual, which is to say boldly expansive spin to this. You may find this gives refuge a transcendent quality:

When we say, “I take refuge in the Buddha” we should also understand that “The Buddha takes refuge in me,” because without the second part the first part is not complete. The Buddha needs us for awakening, understanding, and love to be real things and not just concepts. They must be real things that have real effects on life. Whenever I say, “I take refuge in the Buddha,” I hear “Buddha takes refuge in me.”

We are all Buddhas, because only through us can understanding and love become tangible and effective. Thich Thanh Van was killed during his effort to help other people. He was a good Buddhist, he was a good Buddha, because he was able to help tens of thousands of people, victims of the war. Because of him, awakening, understanding, and love were real things. So we can call him a Buddha body, in Sanskrit Buddhakaya. For Buddhism to be real, there must be a Buddhakaya, an embodiment of awakened activity.

Otherwise Buddhism is just a word. Thich Thanh Van was a Buddhakaya. Shakyamuni was a Buddhakaya. When we realize awakening, when we are understanding and loving, each of us is a Buddhakaya.

<https://tricycle.org/magazine/the-three-gems/>

So, TNH here is speaking of us being capable of having Buddha moments, or you may be more at ease thinking of this as having bodhisattva moments.

- To summarize what we take from considering these different facets of the Buddha, we find these provide us with gratitude, inspiration, and even moments of transcendent realization – when we get it so right there’s no “I” in the “We”.
- What do we refer to as the Dhamma, and in what way or ways is that available for us to take refuge in it?
  - The Dhamma is, of course, a vast body of work; comprising both teachings and practice instructions. In the Theravada tradition our primary sources are we have the Pali Canon and late commentaries
  - The Buddha taught for 45 years, and offered teachings to virtually all segments of society – from kings to a serial killer. He taught people who were brilliant, people who were dull, people who were doubtful and confused; ardent followers and petulant challengers, from all religions and ascetic factions. This demonstrated his reach as a teacher, and helps guarantee there are teachings to be found that are suitable for each of us, even acknowledging our inherent differences and depth of experience.
  - And the Dhamma is extended by interpretations, explanations and explorations offered by teachers who came after the Buddha, right up to today. And we have access not just to their teachings, but to many of these actual teachers – in the flesh and through writings and recorded presentations – to offer us varying degrees of mentorship.
  - We may have to expend a certain amount of effort to find the materials and teachers that speak to us most clearly, but they are there. And the internet gives us easier access today than was ever true before. Even the most casual of Buddhists, even those with but passing curiosity, can get exposed to authentic and profound teachings, which simply was not always the case.
  - These teachings expose us to the four noble truths, the heartwood of the buddha’s understanding of humanity: the challenges confronting each of us with all that is meant by dukkha, and the opportunities available to us to

overcome and find freedom from these.

- When we open to and cultivate realization of these teachings, they bring us clarity, understanding, compassion, confidence.
  - The Buddha offers us the refuges of gratitude, inspiration and purpose. The Dhamma offers us understanding that matures into wisdom; instruction and guidance that matures into skillfulness and confidence. These are additional and complementary refuges, to be sure.
- What do we mean by Sangha, and in what way or ways is this available for us to take refuge in it?
    - In the broadest sense sangha refers to the community of our companion journeyers on our path of purification to the destination of awakening.
    - To traditionalists, there are two forms of sangha: the monastic sangha, which is institutional and comprises monks and nuns, of all levels of both aspiration and attainment, be they deep or shallow practitioners. And, there is what's described as the Noble Sangha, which refers to a fellowship of devout and accomplished practitioners, be they monastics or not. In what I guess is still called Contemporary Western Theravada, there is sangha in the sense we use it here: referring to all people who regularly study and practice and, most importantly, come together to support each other in our movement along the path.
    - If space is the last frontier, we could say that sangha is the final refuge. Beyond our need for gratitude and inspiration, for wisdom and guidance, this is a journey that benefits from having and being in good company.
      - We are frail and forget what we know. We need good friends to remind us we already have the answers.
      - We are subject to distraction, and lose our way. We need good friends to call us back to the path.
      - We get hungry, angry, lonely and tired; we get lazy. We tire of being mindful and present, and instead of seeing what's in front of us with fresh eyes we substitute old views. We tire of investigation, and substitute judgement. We need good friends to say to us, "How do you know this is true?"
      - Dedication and vision fail for a time, and we need others to tell us to look back to where we started, and to see how far we've come!
    - And, we can discover and realize our strengths and wisdom through giving these same gifts to others when they are faltering in any of these ways.

- And, if should all be frail at the same time, we can acknowledge our shared humanity and its limitations.
- We keep each other on the path.
- In our practice, we come to know that our sense of separateness – our stand-alone, stand forever selves – is, at best, only a partial truth. When held as a view that excludes the truth of our interbeing with others and the world around us, separateness is clearly an unwholesome delusion. In the same sense, we may view ourselves as separate from Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; that these are outside of us; that we are weak and have to seek shelter within their external walls. Another, I think more useful, view is that can and, if we let ourselves, do embody Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha within ourselves; and paradoxically we embody these more fully when we share ourselves and these elements with others. This means that we are integral to the shelter we seek. We take refuge from the 8WWs by manifesting and sharing Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Go figure! Who knew?