

From the Editor

If not now, when? If not here, where?

I have often heard Buddhist teachers remark that humans live as if they will live 500 years, while, in actuality, they could die tomorrow. You'll see this evidenced just by looking at those around you; you'll see this evidenced just by looking at yourself and the decisions that you make in each moment. We put off the big stuff to tomorrow, to get the little stuff done today. People all too often make choices, sacrificing their needs in the now, for their projected future—trading youth, family, spiritual life for hours of overtime and the envisioned future retirement, the sandy beach and handsome cabana boy.



This is evidence of what Buddhists refer to as the 'two truths,' conventional reality and ultimate reality. The conventional is that we live today for a better tomorrow; the relative is that tomorrow is never guaranteed. With a recent death in my immediate family, this contrast has been brought painfully home. When brought into sharp contrast, the choices that most of us make day-to-day, moment-to-moment, look amazingly (and ironically) shortsighted. You could die tomorrow. Sometimes that can be a joyous and empowering revelation. Keep that in your mind for just twenty-four hours and see how it nuances your decisions throughout the day.

I can tell you from my recent experience, most people think your nuts when you walk around with a shit-eating grin telling them that they could die tomorrow.

In the mortal words of Ms. Sally Bowles, "Start by admitting from cradle to tomb, it's isn't that long a stay. Life is a cabaret old chum. It's only a cabaret, old chum."

Another teaching that Buddhists like to use is the auspiciousness of one's current birth. In the simplest terms, if you are reading this (or any other spiritual material), or



listening to a master, Vaishnava saint, spiritual friend, etc., than you are in the best place you can be for your spirituality Right Now.

As Buddhist teachers love to remind one, just think how unlikely your birth was. Think how vast the Universe is... how many galaxies there are... how many solar systems in each galaxy... how many planets in each solar system. And you were lucky enough to be born on a planet fortunate enough to have a Buddha incarnate. What's the Vegas odds on that?

Think how many beings there are on just this little planet Earth—not just human beings, but animals, bird, fish and insects, even protozoa and bacteria. Add to that the other realms (at least within the Buddhist worldview) of Gods, demi-gods, ghosts, etc... Well, you get the point. There's a whole hell of a lot of beings you could have been born as and being born human, as Buddhists see it, makes you best positioned to get real spiritual work done.

While animal, demon, and ghost are obviously not the best states to be in, gods and demi-gods, though seemingly better births, are also not considered helpful for spiritual progress. To Buddhists, the higher realms of gods and demi-gods, where all desires are satiated, provide no impetus for spiritual practice. A certain amount of resistance is necessary for one to look toward spiritual study and contemplative practice. Human birth represents the most auspicious balance of resistance and fulfillment—a potential for friction from gain and loss.

So consider how fortunate we are to have this improbable birth on such a planet affording this potential with spiritual teachers and scriptural wisdom. Of all human beings currently incarnated on this planet, think how few actually have the fine balance of friction, fulfillment and intellect to manifest an interest in spiritual life. Of these spiritually interested individuals, not all gather the means and motivation to actively pursue their course of interest. Of these few motivated individuals, only a small number have the fortunate convergence of circumstance to come into contact with a spiritual teacher, sacred scripture or divine friend. Of these few fortunate ones, even fewer have sufficient capacity of attention to listen and receive what is being offered. Of the few who do listen, only a very small percentage actually apply what they hear to their practice in developing a spiritual life.

The Vegas odds are off the board at this point.

Just think for one moment on the nearly infinite improbability of you reading this—well, maybe not this, but the other material in this issue—and having the interest to check it out.



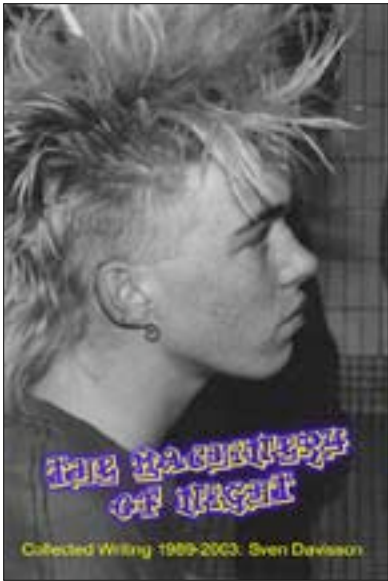
I have heard Geshe Lobzang Tsetan comment that it is simply a matter of respect not to squander this amazing opportunity afforded one—whether we individually consider it a gift of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the Universe or, simply, random circumstance.

It never hurts one’s spiritual development to take a step back and look at the decisions we are making today not in terms of how they affect tomorrow, planning for our idyllic future, but rather how they affect, or what they cost, the present moment. We live our lives as if we will live forever, while the opposite is the only guarantee we have. The only thing one really can say for sure is that our decisions affect us now, allowing that they may, depending on course, nuance our future. There is a paradoxical Zen teaching that, like the John Lennon song, karma is instant. The decisions one makes now affect one right now.

Living in the moment does not mean living for the moment. “Be Here Now” only means that you’re not there then.

“When you’re so committed to the future, it’s real easy to let your life right now turn to shit” Brad Warner in *Hardcore Zen*

Love light laughter,
Sven



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