

The Human Dilemma



The river's source is upstream. The water looks for the mouth to join the seas. It's not an easy ride but inevitable.

All human beings know afflictions are universal. No one escapes the flow of suffering.

The four natural processes bring suffering:

- Birth
- Illness
- Old age
- Death

Birth, although touted as joyful, is both the cause and effect of the three others.

Human beings spend a great deal of effort and time trying to escape suffering and attain lasting comfort. We manufacture endless objects and ideas to convert the suffering into bearable comforts.

We continuously seek to stop the river and nest along the banks.

We maintain a never-ending wish that someday suffering will end once and for all.

We collect and store troves of things. Foolishly we think that the undercurrent will not find us. We stubbornly search for a footing. This dogged digging about for safety in the swampy mud is essentially our attempts to find our mother. We are puppies.

We fail to remember the source. Suffering comes with you at birth and ripens overtime. It is a universal phenomenon. And it's heavenly. This is worth repeating. Suffering is a universal phenomenon and it's heavenly. The river flows from the source.

Although it seems bleak and certainly it is unwelcome. It is unwelcome because we fail to see the source. We know

better than the source. We are bigheaded. We place our trust on our bighead.

Our bighead wants to redirect the river, dam it, and use it for bigheaded wishes. The bighead just doesn't get it because it wants it to be otherwise. It's in shock most of the time.

Give your bighead a rest. Everything gets carved away. And if you look carefully, you'll see for yourself.

The World is Divided into Two

Your bighead splits things into two. It never ceases to divide. It is bloated with the false view that the world is divided in two. This bloat is universal.

It's the basis of conflict. You believe there is a split between good and bad, right and wrong, light and dark. The conference of rules taught you and now you're swollen with divisions.

You seek to keep some things and get rid of others. You take sides. All sorts of distressing situations arise from this wrong view. All prejudice and bias come from this distended head.

This wrong view is pervasive and well-established and even affects our approach to a spiritual life. Many believe that they must go off somewhere or do something special to live a spiritual life. As though awakening to the true nature of reality is for those who seek something better, somewhere good or special.

This view leads to counterfeit treasures and spiritual elitism.

Your own experience may loosen this mental gridlock. It is not necessary to believe this insight; you must see for yourself what is going on here. It is necessary to look carefully and skillfully at this idea and see how it jams your spiritual wheel turning.

As long as you have a wish or an idea to be somewhere else it is impossible to be where you are. As long as you think there is something to get it is impossible to be free. As long as you consider yourself special you will be caught in craving.

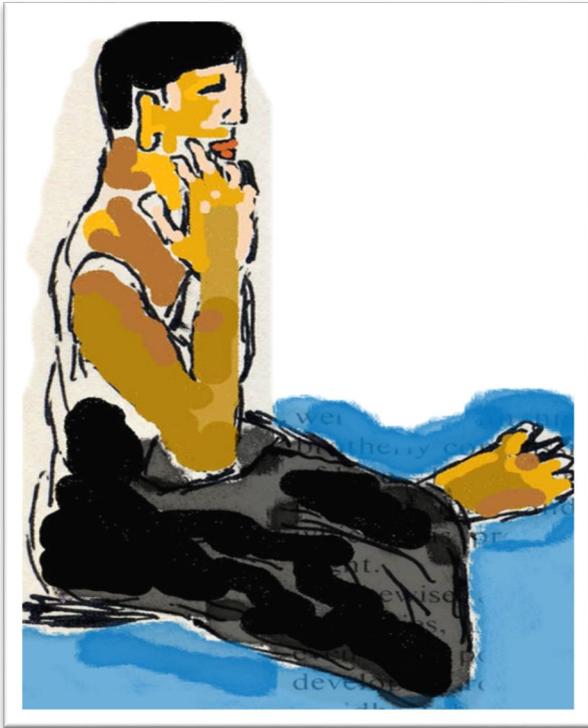
These ideas are rooted in the distorted view that the world is divided in two.

The yearning or thirst to see clearly is not a thirst for something else, somewhere else, somebody else, or someplace else. It is a desire to return to where you are.

Your beliefs delay and impede you. But only you can decide if that is so.

Hui-neng, our ancient Chinese Chan teacher, recognized this to be so and offered it to others. He saw that the light is in the world not somewhere else. He along with many other teachers saw that an “unbiased” mind or a mind that is not split is all one needs to know.

The basis and structure that provides the possibility to clear the mind of this false dichotomy reside in ongoing, continuous practice right in the center of your everyday life.



Long Ago

When spiritual energy arises we need substantial direction. Long ago spiritual travelers sought out some community or some solitary place to find their spiritual heart. It may have been a monastic group or a desert which offered the opportunity of time and freedom from household responsibility.

Householder responsibilities of getting an education, earning a living and rearing offspring requires enormous commitment of time, energy and monies. Solitude and silence are rare and spiritual practice seems to fade into a secondary place. The

householder may feel so burdened by everyday responsibility and dismayed by the steepness of the climb. They may give up. It may feel unfathomable.

Those in monastic settings where structure and rule surround the spiritual traveler receive the benefits of guidance and constant watchfulness. Though different, the spiritual traveler in a household needs structure and rule that offer guidance and allows the spiritual traveler to be watchful within commerce, family and the world politick. Nothing is hidden from spiritual practice.

The spiritual burden of a householder is the same today in the 21st century as it was 2600 years ago. The same load is required for the householder as is required for a monastic. The yoke may be different but the same afflictions of ignorance bear upon all human beings. The same view of dividing the world lives in the mind of the human being. Time and place do not alter this truth.

The overburdened life, whether it be within a structured spiritual community or in a household, hampers the structure and rule needed to awaken. Lessening the burdens of life and placing the mind on the spiritual journey is what is required.

The requisites or fundamentals are the same for all those who seek spiritual awakening whether one is a monk or one is a householder. The belongings are different.

- All need to provide for shelter, food and water, clothing and medicine.
- All need to study and practice.
- All need to receive the bits and pieces of teachings.

All need a daily practice routine.