

Messages from Buddha Heart Village

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(Part I)

In the old days of the agricultural society, one might have been born in a farmer's home and have grown up as a farmer, living in the same house, working in the same field, and seeing the same people. There was no policeman, no lawyer, and no judge. There was no law, because there was no crime.

The education in the village had a clear and simple yet important goal: to teach people to be good. Their teachers were immediate models for their conduct and the sages' words to look beyond. They did not doubt the principles of ethics they learned at school because they saw the principles in practice. The principles were simply the description of the conduct of the people that they all respected, the teachers; just as physics describes the behaviors of the nature. If there was any abnormality of one's behavior, it was a special case or just an error. If it was a special case, it would be treated as such; and if an error, corrected. The principle had no error in the minds of the multitude; only the wise, the sage, could find the errors in the principles; just like in physics, it takes Einstein to find the "little" errors in Newtonian mechanics. They are just errors, not mistakes. Einstein's corrections did not alter the designs of the bridges we walk on, the buildings we live in, the machines roaring in the factories, and even the vehicles flying in the sky and landing on the moon. By the same token, the corrections in the principles of their ethics would not affect the people's conducts in the village. Since they had important work to do, they had no incentives and no interest to speculate. Speculation could not make their plants grow one inch taller. A minor and occasional speculation or metaphysical thought is interesting, healthy, and even necessary to cope with the changing society, no matter how minor the idea might be. But too many speculations will cause the mind to doubt and to be confused, and people to quarrel and mistrust one another, resulting in rebellion and turmoil in society.

The farmer was born and grew up in a peaceful and harmonious environment, and he died quietly and peacefully. During the service of his term, he committed no crime and left no harm to the next generation. He successfully passed his final examination - DEATH.

Now back to the modern age. Let's look at ourselves and our environment. Contrary to the simplicity of the farmer's boy, the child of a middle class family, even at his birth, already has plenty. At his first birthday, he is surrounded by so many toys that he is confused and does not know which one to choose. When he goes to school, he learns so many things, except what a good person should be. The schools do teach children rules but only for the sake of discipline or control, so that the teacher can finish his predesigned program. Students are taught many subjects and many skills, yet they don't know what to do with them, except for one common goal - to get a decent job. That is, a well-paid one.

The modern men work in the jungle of machines, and in return they become slaves of the machines, particularly of computers. If a machine does not work, they become frustrated, accusing others and "kicking" the machine. Then they think that the machine is really stupid and a little crazy while kicking it.

The modern men's entertainments are strong stimulations to the five senses: television to the eyes, noisy music to the ears, strong odors of perfumes to the nose, gourmet cooking to the mouth,

and all kinds of exercises to the muscles (not necessarily good for the whole body). And last but not least, they indulge in sex. Through the sensuous stimulations, modern men dull their sensitivities. To maintain the normal level of feeling, stronger stimuli are needed. But the capacity of any machine has a threshold; when it is reached, the increase of the stimulation will not increase the sensation any more. Without training and wisdom, the desire is insatiable. Modern men are lost. They cannot see the result as the truth. They all ask the same question: "How can I be so miserable after many years of my hard work in my life?" They start to complain, to demonstrate on the streets, and to fight with their fists and the skills that they learned in schools.

Some start to look for cures. They try hobbies, jogging, transcendental meditation, even cocaine and others. Relief maybe; but cure, nay. Some of them turn their directions to look for help from the respectable people - philosophers and scientists, including medical doctors and psychologists.

Philosophers have made more speculations than useful guidance, and asked more questions about life than they can possibly answer. Scientists are so deeply buried in their data, formulas, and experiments and in their fame, money, and power, that they don't even know that they have an ultimate problem in life, to wit, death.

Philosophers and scientists are very intelligent people; but few, if any, can offer any real guidance in life, nor can they pose as models for the multitude of people in the way of living.

How about religions whose doctrines center around God or gods. Can modern men obtain comfort and relief from them? Not really. The difficulties are threefold: (1) Within the circle of the same belief, they have not unanimously agreed on what kind of gods they have. (2) They can only make a person a dependent, if not a slave, of gods - never an independent and free person. (3) They promise a paradise in heaven after death, but offer no method to verify the central concepts in this life. That leaves a big question mark in the minds of most men who like to ponder and search.

I was a Buddhist in my past life; but I didn't plant enough merit to hear the Dharma in the earlier part of this life. On the other hand, I have planted enough to let me first meet the Buddha Teachings through the sixth Patriarch's Platform Sutra after 41 years of ignorance and frustration, struggle and self-searching in darkness. The toils and the vicissitudes through the years were not in vain but had strengthened my characters and laid the proper foundation to receive the wonderful Dharma. In nature and for truths, there are laws only but no luck. Yet, I still couldn't help feeling very fortunate when I met the Buddha Teachings at the age of 41. How much more fortunate you are, my dear collegians and friends.

(To be continued)

A Buddha Heart Villager

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