

An Evening With a Forest
Monk

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An evening with a forest dwelling monk . . .

It was a warm summer evening. My family and I were at our cottage in the foothills in Ceylon. I was enjoying my vacation resting, sipping on tea as I wondrously stared into the lush green mountainside. After quenching my thirst, I wanted to enjoy the beautiful weather by taking a walk outside towards the beautiful mountain forestry. I walked along a stream of water that graciously flowed behind our cottage, and the relaxing sound as the stream flowed down from the mountain calmed me as I entered the mouth of the forest. I started to get a sense of serenity and oneness as I walked further into the forest. It was filled with beautiful lush greens and the melodically enchanting sounds of birds.

After about an hour of walking through the forest, I came across a cave that looked like it was occupied by someone. I had heard from people around the area that often Buddhist monks dwell in the forests in solitude, leaving the regular worldly life behind. As I got closer to the cave, I saw orange robes hung on a wire tied to two tree branches. To my great surprise I saw the monk sitting cross legged, eyes closed, meditating at the foot of the cave. I walked closer and bowed at the feet of the monk; this is considered to be paying respects to the great teachers of Dhamma. The monk opened his eyes and greeted me with a smile. He placed his hand on my head and uttered, “sukhi hotu”, meaning – “may you be well”. He was completely bald, and looked middle-aged. The most compelling feature about him, however, was his sense of calm but welcoming aura.

As a person from the city, so many question came to my mind that I wanted to ask the monk. I asked him if it was ok for me to spend

some time in his cave, to have a discussion with him. He courteously agreed. I wanted to ask him so many question but I knew I would not have enough time to get through them all; therefore I asked him questions that were relevant to not only me but for many of humanity, or so I thought after I received the answers. Our discussion followed as such:



Me: Venerable Sir, How long have you been a monk? And how long have you lived in the forest?

Monk: I have lived in the forest for 20 years, and I have been ordained as a monk for 30 years.

Me: Why do you choose/like to live in the forest?

Monk: The solitude of the forest is unlike any other. It is the most practical place for a monk to develop his meditation. It offers a calming and refreshing environment, away from the distractions that allure our senses in the modern world.

Me: There is so much advancement in our world today, yet there is an equal amount of suffering. Why do you think this is?

Monk: There is indeed rapid advancement in the world. It is because of a very simple reason that we are advancing so rapidly, and for that same reason we suffer.

Me: Venerable Sir, what is this reason?

Monk: The reason is wanting/craving. Scientists and other inventors discover and come out with such technologies and advancements because we want easier ways to accomplish things. We want better and we want more than what we already possess. But if you take a look, this the same reason why we suffer. If we can be satisfied with what we have, and not crave more we can be much happier and lead a life that is content. The thing to understand is, even though we advance because of wanting, the wanting does not cease. Wanting will always create the want for more.

Me: Venerable Sir, throughout history we have seen many wars, a lot of people have died because of it. Many countries these days are hostile with each other and the innocent people suffer. What do you or Buddhism have to say about this? Where do you see a resolution?

Monk: It goes back to the same reason. People create wars based on wanting. They want power, hence the struggle for power. Buddhism teaches “Metta”... it is known as the universal love. The Buddha says one cannot subdue hatred with hatred, but only through love. This is an eternal and a universal law. Picking up arms and killing each other only brings suffering on both ends. If the countries of the world support each other instead of trying to go

to war with each other, we would not need borders. Instead we would have harmony throughout world. We as humans are covered with three evils: Lust, Hatred, and Delusion. Craving feeds these three evils and keeps the rejuvenated. If we were to abandon craving and be in peace with what we possess, whether it be power or possession, the three evils would not sustain. Taking away craving is like taking the sustenance away from the three. This is not an easy practice. It is a road that must be travelled mindfully, but it is one that is achievable. This is a resolution that the world should seek.

Me: There is also many discriminations in this world such as racism and sexism to name a few. What would you say regarding those?

Monk: We see the world through our eyes, and our brain perceives it different from one person to the other. This is a natural phenomenon. We see people who are a different colour from us, we see people who have different sexual preferences, and who are different in terms of their culture. The reason why we judge them is because of all the differences we notice. However, in my opinion we are a lot of more similar that we are different. For example, the one thing we all share is that we suffer from sickness, old age, and death. This is one of our biggest similarities. We need to start focusing on our similarities rather than our differences. We can eliminate discrimination.

Monk: It is getting quite late now, I think it is wise if you head back, you don't want to be travelling through the forest alone in the dark.

Me: As you say Venerable Sir. Thank you very much for answering these questions in great detail for me.

I took my leave from the monk and I felt as if a lot of questions that I had about the world had been answered. I pondered about the answers that the monk gave and thought how in line they are with

the way I thought about the world. I was hoping to see the monk again the next day. As I walked out the forest towards the cottage along the stream, I was excited. I wanted to tell everyone of the lessons I learned from the forest monk.

The End.