

## **Enlightened society**

So do modern humanitarian values lead us to a truly enlightened society? It seems not, rather to a materialist society, to greed for more and more for everyone and resentment for anything less. Or to people swanning along just taking it all for granted. Then there are the rude awakenings prompted perhaps by the jealousy of the poor or the limitations of the resources that materialism feeds on. Is there any peace of mind in it at all? The materialists will only see the peace of mind of getting what they need or want. It is the only peace they know and it will blind them to any other kind of peace. To such people materialism can seem essential to humanitarian effort.

So what does lead us to an enlightened society? It may seem to be going too far to dismiss such efforts altogether. There is a sort of kindness to modern values, it is true, but there is no wisdom to them. Only a wise person sees who and what we really are and hence knows what is truly beneficial. An enlightened society does have humanitarian values in the sense that there is the same wish to ameliorate suffering but in a different way. There is the same quest for happiness but this is also sought in a different place, in a different, spiritual, peace of mind. In order to really embark on a spiritual path for real we do need to abandon the materialist path. We have to abandon the lesser happiness of accumulation of material wealth for the greater happiness of letting go in order to really let go. We have to follow our wisdom not our desire. We have to dismiss the cupboard love for true love and a love of truth.

So what would such an enlightened society look like? It would consist of individuals walking the spiritual path and happy to help others on the same path, content with whatever they may be offered in return. This is letting go in action. There is no seeking anything and therefore no stress. Living like this the practitioner is not clinging to the body, or even to life. Anxiety about the body, worries about where the next meal is coming from, are seen as signs of attachment, signs that the practitioner must strive to go deeper to see the body as not-self.

A practitioner who sees like this and lives accordingly experiences the joy of letting go. They see that the mind and heart become brighter and brighter for letting go of attachment to the body. Hence they see more and more clearly that the mind and body are not the same thing. Thus ultimately seeing the reality of rebirth they see that there is no need for the mind to cling to a particular body. If the mind is established in Dhamma it can carry its virtue and wisdom from one life into the next. There is still compassion, a wish to avoid pain and yet the mind is capable of detaching from the body to the point where physical pain does not cause suffering.

Seeing the suffering of those who cling, such a practitioner realises that seeing wrongly they are unable to let go and, very importantly, they will not try to tell them to let go, let alone try to compel them. They will know that someone has to see for themselves and choose to take on the spiritual life for themselves as a result. They will see that without wisdom their heart is bound to the body so that it is right and proper for us or for society to be doing its best to help such people when necessary with the basics, with what they need simply to survive long enough to see the truth. A true practitioner will naturally be willing to relinquish what they have to help such people.

This is the ideal, that people act through clearly seeing the way existence really is, but it is also true that people can choose to act this way, if to a lesser extent, purely out of faith. They can begin by establishing their own independence and then simply share a little of what they have. This is a start. They will still experience the joy of letting go of selfishness and this will help them further along the Path. Recognising this have we arrived back at humanitarian values? Perhaps we have, depending on what our motivation really is and how far our generosity goes. Generosity can go too far and pull us back into material values. Or sharing can lead us to expect something in return and then we have arrived back at collective greed. We must be careful, very careful.

Maintaining a calm, cool view of the body will help us keep a similar view of everything else. The pleasures of letting go are far greater than that of sensuality, so we are still winning. Hearing or discovering this, however, we must be careful in one more way – letting go is not negative, it is not pushing away or trying to get away, that's going too far, it lacks compassion and simply doesn't work. We must be patient and practice, and let the letting go happen naturally. If we try to force it we'll just get stuck.

I offer this for your reflection.

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