

might add to your devotion. Or perhaps a person or institution has the ability to lessen your fear of the unknown. Other factors such as the family, country, or society you are born into are all part of the assembly of elements that come together as what we call faith.

Citizens of many Buddhist-ruled countries, such as Bhutan, Korea, Japan, and Thailand, are blindly committed to the Buddhist doctrine. On the other hand, many young people in those countries become disillusioned with Buddhism because there is not enough information and too many distractions for the phenomena of faith to stick, and they end up following another faith, or following their own reason.

#### IMPERMANENCE WORKS FOR US

There are many benefits to understanding the notion of assembly, how creating even one boiled egg involves such a vast number of phenomena. When we learn to see the assembled parts of all things and situations, we learn to cultivate forgiveness, understanding, open-mindedness, and fearlessness. For example, some people still single out Mark Chapman as the sole culprit in John Lennon's murder. Perhaps if our celebrity worship were not so great, Mark Chapman would not have created the fantasy of killing John Lennon. Twenty years after the fact, Chapman admitted that when he shot John Lennon, he didn't see him as a real human being. His mental instability was due to a large number of assembled factors (brain chemistry, upbringing, the U.S. mental health care system). When we can see how a sick and tormented mind is assembled, and recognize the conditions under which it is operating, then we are better able to understand and forgive the Mark Chapmans of the world. As in the case of the boiled egg, even if we were to pray for the assassination not to be, it would have been inevitable.

But perhaps even with this understanding, we still fear Mark Chapman because of his unpredictability. Fear and anxiety are the dominant psychological states of the human mind. Behind the fear lies a constant longing to be certain. We are afraid of the unknown. The mind's craving for confirmation is rooted in our fear of impermanence.

Fearlessness is generated when you can appreciate uncertainty, when you have faith in the impossibility of these interconnected components remaining static and permanent. You will find yourself, in a very true sense, preparing for the worst while allowing for the best. You become dignified and majestic. These qualities enhance your ability to work, wage war, make peace, create a family, and enjoy love and personal relationships. By knowing that something is lying in wait for you just around the bend, by accepting that countless potentialities exist from this moment forward, you acquire the skill of pervasive awareness and foresight like that of a gifted general, not paranoid but prepared.

For Siddhartha, if there is no impermanence, there is no progress or change for the better. Dumbo, the flying elephant, came to understand this. As a youngster he was an outcast because of his enormous ears. He was lonely, depressed, and afraid that he would be kicked out of the circus. But then he discovered that his "deformity" was unique and valuable because it enabled him to fly. He became popular. Had he trusted impermanence to begin with, he would not have suffered so much in the beginning. The recognition of impermanence is the key to freedom from fear of remaining forever stuck in a situation, habit, or pattern.

Personal relationships are the most volatile and perfect examples of assembled phenomena and impermanence. Some couples believe that they can manage their relationship "until death do us part" by reading books or consulting with a relationship doctor. Knowing that men are from Mars and women are from Venus provides the key to only a few obvious causes and condi-

tions of disharmony, however. To a certain extent these small understandings may help create temporary peace, but they don't address the many hidden factors that are part of the relationship's assembly. If we could see the unseen, then maybe we could enjoy the perfect relationship—or maybe we would never start one in the first place.

Applying Siddhartha's understanding of impermanence to relationships leads us to a pleasure described in Juliet's poignant words to Romeo: "Parting is such sweet sorrow . . ." Parting moments are often the most profound in a relationship. Every relationship must end eventually, even if it is because of death. Thinking this, our appreciation for the causes and conditions that have provided each connection is heightened. It is especially powerful if one partner has a terminal illness. There is no illusion of "forever," and that is surprisingly liberating; our caring and affection become unconditional and our joy is very much in the present. Giving love and support is more effortless and satisfying when our partner's days are numbered.

But we forget that our days are *always* numbered. Even if we understand intellectually that everything born must die and that everything assembled will eventually disintegrate, in our emotional state we constantly slip back into operating out of a belief in permanence, entirely forgetting interdependence. This habit can foster all kinds of negative states: paranoia, loneliness, guilt. We may feel put upon, threatened, mistreated, neglected—as if this world were unjust to us alone.

#### BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

When Siddhartha left Kapilavastu, he was not alone. In the predawn hours, as his family and servants slept, he went to the stable, where Channa, his chariot driver and most trusted friend, slept. Channa was speechless at the sight of Siddhartha unat-

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