

## *1: The Starting Point of Happiness*

### **1. The Start of Your Life on Earth**

You may sometimes find yourself seized by an indescribable fear and wish you could run away from reality. However, this is the very time to stand your ground and look back at how your life in this earthly world started.

You started with nothing. You may have been born rich or poor, but that made no difference to you as a baby, smiling innocently in your cradle. In a tiny body weighing about seven pounds, a little life was sleeping quietly, but with a strong determination to run the course in the race of life. Before you grew up to be an adult, you received so much care and gave so little back to others.

You may have experienced your very first setback as a small boy or girl when you compared your situation to that of others. Some people begin very early on to complain and become resentful. This is the way to drop out at the first lap of the race of life. Forgetting that they started out in this life with nothing

and mistaking this earthly world for a permanent home, some people begin to compare what they have been given with what their friends have. As a result, they feel they have been given less than others and become discontented. A boy may envy his friend because the father is a wealthy doctor, his friend has plenty of money, and always wears expensive clothes. A girl may feel resentful because both her parents work during the day and do not have much time to spend with her.

However, everybody started out with nothing. In other words, we do not bring anything into this life with us. Starting with nothing, we are given so much in our childhood—clothes, food, a home, an allowance, educational opportunities, teachers, friends, materials for study, televisions, radios, stereos, and, above all, hope for the future. Starting with nothing and having been given a great deal, we nevertheless form an image of ourselves as needy.

If you reflect deeply, you will find that, even though you have grown up, the main cause of your anxiety has been comparing yourself with others. The roots of your suffering lie in your childhood, when you had already forgotten the starting point of your earthly life and begun to compare yourself and what you had with others around you.

Buddhism teaches the importance of knowing how to be content. Without the perception that every individual starts with nothing and lives a life that is unique, a life that cannot be compared with anyone else's, you will not understand this truth.

## **2. Discovering Your True Worth**

We cannot remain children and keep comparing our situation with that of others. We each go through many different experiences, meet different people, and come across many different ideas. Then, at some point in our lives, an encounter with religious truth awaits. An encounter with Truth will bring you the powerful delight of discovery. Your true worth as a person lies not in the quantity of material wealth that has been gifted to you, nor in your reputation in the eyes of other people. Your true worth lies in the quality and the depth of Truth, the strength of the light that you can attain during this life on Earth. Awakening to this truth will completely turn your view of life around. You will realize that the more of your own divine nature you discover within yourself, the higher you will be able to rise spiritually.

## **3. Columbus's Egg**

You may be familiar with the story of Columbus's egg. At a banquet to celebrate Columbus's discovery of the new continent, some criticized the explorer, saying that anyone could have discovered that land. Columbus then challenged those present to stand an egg up on the table. Everybody tried but failed. When his turn came finally, Columbus showed how to stand the egg up by making a crack in one end of the shell. This story illustrates how difficult it is to do something for the first time, even though it may look simple to everyone who comes after.

In a way, the truth about life is rather like the story of Columbus's egg. Great religious figures in the past have shown people how to stand an egg on one end again and again. They

have shown that every one of us—we who start our earthly lives with nothing—has a possibility of becoming a saint if we continue to refine our souls, regardless of family background or upbringing.

What simple truth did these religious leaders show us, as Columbus did with his egg? They showed us that all we can take to the other world is our own souls. When we die, we have to leave our social status, our reputation, our property or other material possessions behind. If we return to the other world with only our souls, then the most valuable learning in this earthly world is to polish and refine our souls.

I imagine that many people will protest: “Anyone could have come up with such a simple truth.” However, if no one had gone before to set an example, we would not be able to answer the question as to what human beings should learn from life. It is my sincere wish that as many people as possible awaken to the fact that the lives of great figures in the past are examples of Columbus’s egg.

#### **4. Refining Your Soul**

Using the example of Columbus’s egg, I have explained a truth about life. When you die and return to the other world, you cannot take anything with you except your soul. So concerns about anything other than your inner life will eventually come to naught. What distinguishes great figures from ordinary people is that they have awakened to the truth about refining their souls and have actually put that truth into practice. Unless you have made an effort to refine your soul you do not qualify to be called a great figure.

Abraham Lincoln is still widely respected, although there have been many presidents of the United States before and since. People respect him not because he reached the highest position in his country but because he continually refined his soul. “With malice toward none” was the motto he carried to the end of his life. Have you ever met anyone with the same motto as Lincoln, who makes the effort to put it into practice every day? Abraham Lincoln is very famous for his role in the American Civil War, as the man who succeeded in unifying north and south. Despite the fact that he represented the north, he told his wife and subordinates to stop speaking ill of southerners; he said they themselves would have behaved in the same way had they been born in the south. Lincoln continually refined his soul with mottos such as “with malice toward none, with charity for all” and “judge not, lest ye be judged.” His attitude inspires hope.

Lincoln was born into a poor family, and he was said to have been not at all good looking. He was shot by John Wilkes Booth in Ford’s Theater in Washington, D.C. on Friday, 14th April 1865, and died the next morning. Although he died a tragic death, in life he was filled with a golden light that inspired people all around the world. When Lincoln was on his deathbed in a cheap hotel room, his most trusted aide, Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War, murmured to himself that nobody in the world had such total control of his state of mind as the man who was lying there.

In fact, controlling our state of mind is the great challenge in life, and anyone can take up this challenge, anywhere, at any moment. When you are in complete command of your inner state, you will be one of those closest to God. When you have

succeeded in solving the mysteries of the inner world, you will find a utopia within yourself.

### **5. Put Giving Love First**

I have said that we start our lives with nothing and then grow up receiving a lot of help and love from the people around us, and if we do our best to refine our souls no matter what the circumstances, we can eventually become a man or woman of great character. We create our own worth ourselves. Our worth is not determined by our birth, our upbringing, or our experiences.

There are people who take too much interest in psychic abilities, who visit psychics to have readings about their past lives and then boast that they have been great figures in history. Even if it is true, it has no bearing on their present lives, nor does it throw any light on their future. Your worth right now depends on what you wish to achieve.

Do you continually complain about what you have been given and what is actually in front of you? Or do you know how to be grateful, and wish to give something back to society through your actions? It all depends which side you choose, giving or taking. In a way, this life is a trial, and we are all being tested every minute.

Think first about how you can give love and make this your daily goal. How much love can you give to people and society? Love is a blessing, an energy that nourishes others. Love is giving courage, strength, and hope to the people you meet in the course of your life.

Sooner or later you will realize that love is the will of God, and that it encourages every being to live and grow and create

a great harmony. God's will is to encourage the development of every being. When you make up your mind to put the giving of love first, the light that comes from God fills you. When you start wishing to nourish others, compassion arises in you and this is the proof that you are the child of God.

There are two kinds of love—one is a love that takes, the other a love that gives. Love that takes is a synonym for attachment, while love that gives is the opposite of egotism and selfishness. Wanting to catch someone and control them completely, as you would catch a bird and keep it in a cage, is a far cry from love that gives. No matter how much money or how many things you give someone, if your aim is to bind them to you, it is a love that takes. True love is selfless. It does not expect anything in return, but encourages another person to grow and develop. Love does not bind another but finds goodness within and sets him or her free.

You have probably observed that the nature of love that gives is like the sun that constantly gives us light and heat, expecting nothing of us in return. In fact, another name for love that gives is compassion. Compassion is the very essence of love that gives, and it is the core of the will of God. Love that takes gives birth to a daughter called Jealousy, and a son called Self-Satisfaction. It does not give rise to happiness.

## **6. The Starting Point of Happiness**

By now, you probably understand that happiness begins with the effort to put love that gives into practice. In other words, it is the effort of attuning to the compassion of God. When you determine to give love to the people around you and to society, letting go of your ego, that is your starting point of happiness.

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If you cause others pain in the pursuit of your own satisfaction, you will never know the real meaning of happiness.

Let us make ourselves radiant in order to dispel the darkness and, like the flame of a candle, like a lighthouse, give out light to those around us. Even if a flame is passed from one torch to another, the flame of the original torch is not diminished. In the same way, the love that we give will spread and its sum will eventually light the darkness of the night, having been passed from one person to another, from one heart to another.