

Friday, January 28, 2022, 2:16 pm

The Buddha: A 2010 PBS documentary film

We, a |group of college friends, meet bi-weekly via Zoom calls to discuss various topics ranging from Societal, Technological, Economic, Ecological, Ethics, Ideas, Policy and Political Trends. Recently we discussed the concept of Karma (Life cycle of birth-rebirth). Karmic theory is based on reincarnation which is a central tenet of the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religions. After our discussion on Karma, I wrote the following to our group.

“If your curiosity was aroused about Buddha’s life and his teachings, I would like to share this 2010 PBS documentary film THE BUDDHA. There are many films on Buddha but I like this one for its simplicity in explaining Buddha's teachings.”

“Over the years, I have watched it many times and it has inspired me with new insights every time I have watched it. It runs for 2 hour and 40 min. Please watch in quietude.”

It was directed by David Grubin and narrated by Richard Gere. It follows the story of Gautama Buddha's life and discusses the history and teachings of Buddhism. The film was nominated for the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Writing for a Nonfiction Programming.



https://m.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2135&v=Vc7_VyVXDLs&feature=emb_logo

Saturday, January 29, 2022, 1:52 pm

A friend had following questions after watching the Buddha film:

Truly an excellent rendering that I watched uninterrupted in one sitting. I have a couple of questions.

- 1) Does one have to practice chastity and forsake family life to be a true Buddhist?

- 2) Siddhartha left a wife and newborn child to search for an answer to end suffering. "What about the suffering he inflicted on his wife and young child?"

Any comments?

My Reply on Saturday, January 29, 2022, 10:33 pm

These are interesting and perceptive questions.

With regard to the first question, "Does one have to practice chastity and forsake family life to be a true Buddhist?"

I will answer not from the Buddhist point of view, but from my own beliefs and experiences.

With Sumi's progressive cognitive decline due to her Alzheimer's disease, I have been told by few close, well meaning friends (directly or obliquely) that I have few good years in front of me and I am wasting them by not putting Sumi in the outside care facility nursing home so I can pursue other interests. Underlying inference being, I should abandon my current *Sansarik Karma* (worldly duties) and seek a new path (meaning, new activities, new relationships). Here *Karma* is meant as an act of doing or performing your duties, and not the Karma associated with the life cycle of birth-rebirth.

By devoting this stage of my life in taking care of Sumi allows me to continue my *Sansarik* or *Bhautik* (earthly) life at home.

Even with her steadily declining cognition, there are elements of reciprocity in our affection for each other. I smile with her, hug her, kiss her on forehead and the cheeks (even in the presence her caregivers and other visitors). This affection is more on the spiritual level. From the receiver's (Sumi's) view point, she experiences compassion and realizes that she is loved and cared by all including, her caregivers. That has calming effect on her. Her calmness creates peace in my mind, creating an upward positivity in the caregiver (me) and the care receiver (Sumi). This at-peace, *Sansarik* relationship provides me a chance to contemplate, reflect, do self-analysis and have an opportunity to grow and become *Adhyatmik* (Spiritual).

I consider myself very fortunate to have lived in the two countries with two unique cultures (Eastern and Western). First 23 years in India, and the last 51 in the US. This has allowed me to adopt best from each cultures. India taught me belief system, philosophy, ethical values, its cuisine, its art in the form of dance, music and movies.

Whereas, living in the US, or the Yankee Ingenuity has taught me an attitude of inventive improvisation to overcome adversity, honed the faculties of my left brain; such as, logic, verbal, analytical and linear thinking. Pragmatic approach to problem solving and most importantly - authenticity, the can-do attitude and self-reliance.



Having spent a life-time career in the automotive industry, what comes to my mind from the Japanese car brand Lexus is their slogan - "In Pursuit of Perfection." To me, to aim perfection is divine. It is akin to what Buddha sought - to become a perfect human being, break the life cycle of birth-rebirth and achieve Nirvana. Thus, it is natural for a Japanese company to pursue perfection reflecting the influence of their Buddhist culture. Self-actualization, upper hierarchical needs defined by Maslow, applies to few select people just like Lexus caters to select few of the upper economic strata.

Whereas, I am more in tune with Nike's slogan, "Just do it." While taking care of Sumi, I have to constantly improvise my approaches and methods to ensure safety and well-being. I am not aiming for perfection in what I have to do for Sumi, but I just do the things. Keep what works and discard

that doesn't. I am more like Nike at heart. My goal is not trying to achieve self-actualization but satisfying the love and belonging and esteem needs defined by Maslow. Nike caters to everyone, from accomplished athletes to ordinary people.

In short, I live in *Sansar* and do what I have to do. It boils down to: *Sansar Hi Saar Hai* (Sansar is the real essence of all things). To become spiritual, one does not have to forsake family life (Sansar). By performing one's *Sansarik* duties, one can achieve what Buddha set out to do. Though, in Buddha's case, he abandoned his wife and children to have his own salvation.

Objectively speaking, one can say Buddha's act was self-seeking. By abandoning his wife and a new born child, he showed lack of compassion for them. Once he got his enlightenment, we don't know if he felt sorry for his act. The irony is: he preached compassion for the mankind as the central message of his life-long teachings, but consciously decided not practice on his own family.

Or, one can say in Buddha's mind by abandoning his *Sansarik* duties of taking care of his wife and child, he set out in the pursuit of a higher goal of showing the path of the salvation of the mankind and leaving his wife and child was an act of, "End justifying the means." Or, the guilt arising out of forsaking his family may have heavily weighed on him and inspired him to seek the real meaning of all *Sansarik* bondages and thus a higher goal in life.

Above two paragraphs are an indirect answer to the second question, "What about the suffering he inflicted on his wife and young child?"