



Inspirations and Reflections

By Khemaka

In February this year when awareness of the seriousness of the Covid-19 virus began to dawn on me and most of us, I felt a lot of fear and was tearful often for no obvious reason. I have asthma and had been coughing, wheezing, feeling breathless and tired for some weeks. The fear I felt was fear of dying soon. Death felt very close. The tears, I think, were partly about that too, but also a keen sense that people (particularly in Italy at that time) were dying. People were grieving. People were not able to be with the dying person they loved and around whom their world revolved. An immeasurable sense of loss, complete helplessness, frustration, anger, aloneness.

Now, in May, some of that sense of loss and fear is still with me. There is suffering. There is pain, grief, loss.

Over time, another realisation has slowly dawned on me and on many others: a sense of change which brings with it some benefits and that is increasingly what I see. A fragile hope is growing that some of the gains could possibly stay with us. In so many ways, a feeling of gratitude, a tangible and often expressed appreciation is being expressed by it seems all of us around the world – for the people who support us (from bin men to delivery drivers; from nurses to shopkeepers) and save lives. These people are there all the time. They were doing their jobs before and will continue after this emergency. So, what is different is that we understand how important they are, how connected and how dependent we are. A small insight into the way things are.

I have, like so many people, taken to walking (usually slowly) in the nature which is everywhere and being opened up to the beauty around me. On a sangha night a few weeks ago, we were invited to say something about what brings us joy. I think all of us responded by talking about experiencing bird song, watching bird flight, deer, squirrels, trees and flowers burgeoning. We seemed to be appreciating the “natural” world. The inverted commas are there because talk of the natural world raises the question: what is the unnatural world? Hmm. An interesting question. Perhaps an important question.

In slowing down, in doing less, there is space for reflection; space to ask what kind of transformation our world needs, that **we** need. Facing the possibility of death, with many of us having time on our hands, smelling the cleaner air, hearing the dawn chorus uninterrupted by traffic noises, what do we want our “new normal” to be like? Can this tenuous sense of community survive a return to work pressures, commuting, urgent deadlines? For the huge number of volunteers, will they be able to continue to give and receive the benefits of service to others with no monetary gain?

It seems to me that we are experiencing a precious time when reality is offering a chance to live more in the great mandala of aesthetic appreciation and of connection. My hope is that we will be able to remember what we are learning for a long time to come.

In the words of our morning puja: “Only the Dharma can free me and others from suffering for ever”.