

The Illusion of Separateness: Jack Kornfield

Once we learn to quiet our mind, the next step is seeing the truth. We deliberately turn toward the difficulties of the world, and shine the light of understanding. “The enemy,” said Ajahn Chah, “is delusion.” Delusion blames others, creates enemies and fosters separation. The truth is that we are not separate. War, economic injustice, racism, and environmental destruction stem from the illusion of separateness. It is delusion that separates us from other humans, the trees and the oceans on this increasingly small planet. When we look truthfully, we can also see that no amount of material and scientific advancement will solve our problems alone. New computer networks, innovative fuels and biological advances can just as easily be diverted to create new weapons, exacerbate conflicts and speed environmental degradation. Economic and political change will fail unless we also find a way to transform our consciousness. It is a delusion that endless greed and profit, hatred and war will somehow protect us and bring us happiness.

More than half a century ago, President Eisenhower, who had been the Supreme Allied Commander of the forces that won the Second World War, gave a remarkable address. Speaking just before he left office, Eisenhower, the world’s most respected military man, spoke out against the madness and unchecked growth of the defense industry worldwide. “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children...This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.” President Eisenhower spoke of the immense cost of the military industrial complex which, like the prison industrial complex and the foreign policy power complex, chooses power and profit instead of compassion. We must learn that this will not make us safe. Collective wellbeing arises when we govern by wisdom and loving-kindness instead of fear. “Human beings should refrain from causing harm to one another and not allow their actions to be based on hatred and greed,” said the Buddha, in words that speak directly to modern times. “They should refrain from killing, from stealing. They should refrain from occupations that bring suffering, from weapons trade, from any actions that bring the enslavement of others.” Through these words, he was not proclaiming a religious code. He was providing a social psychology for the happiness of individuals and the collective. In facing the truth, we choose to bear witness to our personal and collective suffering with compassion.

In the end, the unarmed truth will come out. Martin Luther King said, “I still believe that standing up for the unarmed truth is the greatest thing in the world. This is the end of life. The end of life is not to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. The end of life is to do the will of God, come what may.” These words describe the moral and psychological power that steps out of delusion and tells us the truth.

This excerpt is taken from the book, “The Wise Heart”