

Questions for Reflection
Talk 2, Series 12

1) First: Reflecting on Siddhartha's refusal to take offers to take over the two leading teachers' congregations, because he recognized that the progression into lofty, ethereal mental realms did not ultimately lead to the complete liberation from suffering that he sought--one is aware of how precise he was in his knowing of what he sought. This quality of precision plays a large role in determination. It would be good to question yourselves in how you are in the "determination" department? Do you know exactly what you want and do your efforts to get it make the same beeline as Siddhartha's? Give some examples of you succeeding or not succeeding. You might even give an example of an obstacle and how you approach your obstacle.

2) Second: It's easy to see when one is gaunt, with ribs sticking out all over, that one is not following the Middle Way. Another way of saying this is that one's life is out of balance. Please take this opportunity, while we are on the subject of going overboard, to examine your own life from this standpoint. Are there any ways in which you are not following the Middle Way? Is your life out of balance in some area or areas? Do you have a tendency to go overboard? Or if not, notice that. You might also comment in this case how being balanced in your habits helps you in your thinking and in your life in general.

3) Third: Taking the Mara part of Siddhartha's story as a lens to your own life, do you let "things" distract you from your avowed purposes? I've noticed that intentions have a way of being disrupted and that as soon as one sets one, the whole world seems to mobilize itself to destroy it. I noticed this particularly when trying to establish a daily writing practice, every single day there was a good reason to skip it. It was unbelievable! Are you able to follow your intentions pretty faithfully or are you lax and new ones never seem to get off the ground? Please explore this part of your life using the Buddha's experience under the Bo Tree as a point of comparison.

4) Fourth: The transformation embodied in Siddhartha's awakening is simply about fully settling into the deep, wide self we already are, totally interconnected with the whole universe, but expressed uniquely in this individual life. This

experience is as close to us as the ground beneath our feet. It is not achieved in some other, external, heavenly realm. The earth we sit on is rich and fertile, teeming with life and awareness. What is your idea of awakening or enlightenment? Try to capture it in words even though we know that it is not capture-able. Is it a surprise to hear that it is as close as the ground beneath your feet?

5) Fifth: As a mendicant the Buddha ate whatever was offered, a traditional policy of Buddhist monkhood that sometimes outweighed the general preference for vegetarianism and the avoidance of killing animals. How would you describe your own "policies" around eating? This is an area where there is often a lot of discrimination. In that case especially it is good to be conscious about them.