

VULNERABILITY



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As found in the Sermons chapter in 'The Unhindered Path' by Rev John Paraskevopoulos.

Publisher: Sophia Perennis SBN-10:1621381986 ISBN-13: 978-1621381983

In modern society, people often go to great pains to avoid appearing vulnerable. Vulnerability is commonly seen as a weakness which betrays our innermost frailties and exposes the fears we are reluctant to show the world. This can sometimes lead to us assuming a false sense of control over our lives and an unwillingness to be candid with our emotions. The fear of becoming hurt or wounded, in our relationships with other people or in our dealings with the world, serves to undermine our capacity for intimacy and self-knowledge. All these tendencies, which are quite common, are capable of causing much distress and suffering in our lives. They can stunt our inner growth and prevent us from becoming fully human – as precarious as that can be.

We often feel that there are no resources to draw upon in coping with life except our own sense of right and wrong, and that this justifies us in shutting out the world and blunting our receptivity to its vital experiences. If all we can rely on is our view of how things appear to us, we may very well be able to protect ourselves, to some degree, from being overwhelmed by those realities that can hurt us. In doing so, however, we may also be depriving ourselves of other perspectives which can help us to overcome some of the difficulties from which we seek to flee.

Shakyamuni Buddha taught that the root of much of our suffering can be found within us; that it is our own prejudices and false impressions that provide the fuel for sustaining our endless anxieties. This, in turn, perpetuates our belief in a permanent and stable self that is but a chimera [n. *fantasy*] which life's troublesome experiences soon expose. By fuelling this sense of a 'self' that is separate from others and disconnected from the surrounding world, we soon begin to form a hardened shell around us which lets nothing in and which slowly, but surely, leads to spiritual atrophy [n. *wasting*] through lack of proper nourishment.

By encountering the Buddha's Light, we naturally feel compelled to abandon ourselves to it and come to resist our ingrained tendency to conceal our innermost fears and anxieties, for we willingly choose to surrender these as well. When [*if ever*] we genuinely experience the immense compassion of the Buddha, we cannot but joyfully abandon the shackles with which we have allowed ourselves to be bound. No longer entrusting ourselves to our myopic [adj. *narrow-minded*] views, we are free to express our full individuality without fear of being hurt or judged harshly by others. We learn to accept ourselves, with all our imperfections, because we are accepted by the source of life itself which does not discriminate between the good and the bad, the young and old or man and woman.

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Accordingly, we learn to become ‘our foolish selves’ as the Pure Land master Hōnen once said.

We cease trying to do violence to ourselves by abandoning all attempts at conforming to a false image of who we are – an image created by self-centred obsessions which imprison us and cut us off from everything that is true and real. No source reference provided by author.

Ultimately, surrender is the key for it relieves us of our karmic burdens and allows us to become authentic individuals untrammelled [adj. *unrestrained*] by the need to pretend to be better, or even other, than what we really are.

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