

Order of Mind and Society: Reading *The Winter's Tale vis-à-vis Selected Teachings of Buddha*

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Abstract

This paper reads The Winter's Tale by William Shakespeare and Buddha's teaching on mindfulness collected mainly in The Middle Length Discourse of Buddha and The Dhammapada together. Unable is the human mind to predict the kind of thoughts it might experience next, same is the case with life that human beings live in this universe. Leontes in the play finds it hard not to believe on his thoughts. Since he fails to watch his own thoughts, he loses several precious belongings in his life. Buddha in his teachings makes us cautious about the trick our own thoughts can play upon the beholders. Be aware of own thoughts is the call. Two different forms of expression produced over two different times and places, the play and the teachings as tales of human mind may help readers to articulate one with the help of other. The paper concludes that together these texts reveal to the readers that society is run as much as by people in power politically and militarily as it is by the people who are mindful and act responsibility. Without mindful individuals, powerful rulers alone fail to provide order to their society and life.

Keywords: mindfulness, tyrant, dukha, karma, compassion

This paper aims to explore the issue that the unpredictable and incomprehensive nature of our mind necessitates human beings listen to each other, remain alert about the possible harm the horses they and their fellow travelers ride may cause, develop interdependency between and among fellow denizens and also search ways to cultivate mindfulness so that one is able to help oneself and others in need. To reach this conclusion, it has selected *The Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare for discussion, and Buddha's teachings from *The Dhammapada* and *The Middle Length Discourse of Buddha* as interpretative strategies of the play.

Buddhism accepts mind as one of the most dominant force in human life. It demonstrates that mental states are fleeting moments whereas mind is the home where we take a recluse. "Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts, suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox" (60), writes Weragoda Sarada Thero, a Shri Lankan translator and Buddhist thinker in the introduction of his book. One of the world's most reverend texts *The Dhammapada* centers round its grand theme that mind is the source of suffering as well as joy human beings may experience in life. A collection of Buddha's teachings, *The Middle Length Discourse of Buddha* evokes and

discusses human mind in its multiple statures: enlightened, meditational, naive and so on. One common thing the teachings collected in these books tell is that handling mind one's own is the most difficult task for human beings. To trust or not to trust own mind becomes the question. However, there is a bright side as well since those who are able to cultivate a mindful state possess insights to chaff thoughts that are 'vital' from the 'trivial' ones. Such human beings can make the best of their mind. While doing so, they rescue not only themselves but also others in need.

The analogies that human mind an ox, for that matter a horse; human life a cart do engage the perceivers to take human life in a state of perpetual journey in this universe. Individually taken, each of us is a sojourner; collectively, we form a caravan as it were. Invisible yet dominant the horses by their very nature stride; the wheels of life roll. Among the carts some go off the track; others regain it. The horse each sojourner rides may remain disciplined one moment or it may go wild next. Everything is unexpected here in this caravan. Some horses take the holders through psychologically dark, undecipherable jungles of emotions, actions and circumstances, yet others may bring discoveries and joys not only to their riders but also to the fellow sojourners. It is natural that among the riders many may find it hard to understand their own horse. In such context, a state of helplessness prevails in each person's life. The state of not being able to decipher one's own mind does make human beings face the universe staggeringly. This state of helplessness and danger necessitates a bond of interdependence between and among fellow denizens: interdependency between teachers and their gurus, masters and their servants, friends and friends, wife and husband and so on.

Being captivated is the mental state that overshadows the beginning part of *The Winter's Tale*. Leontes desires to prolong an ongoing nine-month-long merry-making act. His desire is tinged with a certain infatuation as it were. Such desire to keep on clinging on fun with his childhood friend Polixenes, the fellow king of Bohemia may sound natural to him but for outsider it is no less than an obnoxious act. So much so that Archidamus and Camillo, the confidants of Polixenes and Leontes respectively reveal a plan to give this merry-making yet another round of continuity in Bohemia as well. This mental state that Leontes is caught in and the influence it is casting on others' mind forces Hermione to get involved into the action that breeds unpleasant consequences in her and Leontes's conjugal life. Carried away by Leontes's whim, she surrenders to his plan. So does Polixenes. 'To be boy eternal' (Act I, Scene II) is the desire both of them seem to have given to.

Among other things that a mind in such state lacks is the quality of mindfulness. No sooner does horse that Leontes is riding goes obnoxious for a certain period of time, it changes its avatar. That very desire of remaining 'boys' eternally and his vow to cling onto it becomes a counter-productive act. Abruptly, Leontes gets into a dangerous state of mind: jealousy, one among fundamental causes of human suffering or dukhkha

(08) in Buddha's teachings. This mental state that lasts not more than a few days creates painful predicament that makes Leones and others suffer for sixteen years. The particular scene where Hermione and Polixenes hold a conversation, a scene of Leontes's own creation backfires him: "Too hot, too hot! To mingle friendship far, is mingling bloods". Leontes's mind or horse loses the track as it were. Gone paranoid, he talks nonsense to his son. His strange gestures and expressions stun Polixenes and Hermione. Under the influence of this mental state, Leontes fails to separate things that is 'vital' from the one that is 'trivial'. Stephen Greenblatt, one of the leading contemporary scholars on William Shakespeare's plays and the performance cultures of the Renaissance period draws a powerful analogy between Leontes and the dictators of the twenty first century globally. He calls Leontes a 'tyrant': "What he actually wants is loyalty he does not mean integrity, honor or respectability. He means an immediate, unreserved confirmation of his own views and a willingness to carry out his orders without hesitation. When an autocratic, paranoid, narcissistic ruler sits down with a civil servant and ask for his loyalty, the state is in danger" (124). Similar to the way the tyrants of modern world have caused the general public suffer and have been violating norms and values of human rights out of their ego and greed, the stubborn minded Leontes ruins several lives, is the point Greenblatt wants to establish. Closed remains Leonte's mind. As a result, similar to the karma that the millions of people who oppose tyrants either have to exile themselves or stay home with resentment, Camillo and Paulina face the same situation in life.

Leontes is deluded and his delusion costs a lot. First and foremost, the innocent members of his royal family suffer. Then does suffer himself. Exposing the secrets of such deluded mind that individuals are caught into, The Dhammapada remarks "the deluded, imagining trivial things to be vital to life, follow their vain fancies and never attain the highest knowledge" (79). Leontes instead of detaching himself from his fanciful horse, he rides it. Instead of holding the rein of the horse, he runs it over others and also to himself. 'Imaginings' can be dangerous, this is one of the most repeatedly stressed messages Buddha wanted to pass on to his disciples as the collections of his teachings reflect. Though meant for the monks and aspiring monks, his message evokes the day to day hurdles ordinary people may face in their life as they struggle to keep themselves safe from their own fancies. Explaining this psychological state as taught in The Dhammapada, a North Indian Buddhist philosopher of the eighth century Santideva explains,

... not perceiving the way things are, but perceiving incorrectly, is ignorance. When there is this kind of ignorance, the three types of conditioning are brought into existence; directed towards goodness, directed towards vile actions, directed towards the imperturbable. These are called "conditioning having ignorance as a condition. (217)

This area of studies is beyond the scope of this paper. What it likes to emphasize is the 'vile actions' that Leontes commits after he fails to perceive "the way things are". Ignorant about the consequences, he becomes the victim of his own decision.

Illuminating the possible consequence that the action taken under such state of mind is bound to generate, Santideva further writes, "... wherever ignorance sows the seed of consciousness in the field of action, the moisture of craving flows forth, and a collection of sense-spheres arises, it grows in the mother's womb, and the sprout of name and form comes into existence" (218). Leontes's course of life sets to take a painful contour as soon as his jealous state of mind takes the driving seat. His 'sense-sphere' harvests 'name and form' out of nowhere. Evoking this incomprehensible nature of his mind and action, Harold Blooms writes that Leontes "beholds the spider in the cup even when it is not there", and Bloom defines him as "Shakespeare's most frightening study of paranoid sexual jealousy, surpassing Othello's agonies, if only because there is so little foregrounding provided for Leontes's madness" (ix). Once Leontes sets his horse loose, the scene changes. His best friend becomes the worst enemy to him. His 'better half', the Queen becomes the worst half, one of the most hated persons in his life. His confidant Camillo becomes the betrayer par excellence to him. He loses his son forever. He loses his daughter for sixteen years. Moreover, he seals himself off from the light that Paulina wants to bring in his thick clouded mind. He is bound to suffer. Suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox or horse. Probably, this could be one of the reasons why he draws empathy from his audience. His fall reminds the audiences or readers the worldview human beings are prone to create, and the consequences they are bound to bear.

Unknown about the future course, Leontes faces both the incomprehensible and unpredictable characteristics of human life for that matter mind. Explaining how Shakespeare's protagonists mainly from the tragedies respond to such difficult experiences, David Scott Kastan writes:

For Shakespeare, anyhow, the uncertainty is the point. Characters may commit themselves to a confident sense of the tragic world they inhabit; but the plays inevitably render that preliminary understanding inadequate, and the characters struggle unsuccessfully to reconstruct a coherent worldview from the ruins of the old. And it is the emotional truth of the struggle rather than the metaphysical truth of the worldview that is at the center of these plays. Shakespeare's tragedies provoke the questions about the cause of the pain and loss the plays so agonizingly portray, and in the refusal of any answers starkly prevent any confident attribution of meaning or value to human suffering. (08)

Caught in such 'inadequate' state, Shakespeare's protagonists lose their control over thoughts and the fluid situations. Such 'agony' they live through does heighten their humanness, and affirms a bond they have with the audiences.

The Winter's Tale takes a motion. Its course is all set to make Leontes suffer miserably. Why does he succumb to this dangerous state of mind? Should his karma of past life or the kind of life that he is living now be blamed? Once fallen into this state, Leontes becomes dangerously stubborn that he expects everyone see and observe things from his point of view: "Is whispering nothing? Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses? ... horsing on foot on foot? Skulking in corners?" (01: 02). Jealousy hammers his mind and inscribes a message that Leontes takes it for guaranteed. Under its influence, he expects Camillo to surrender his disbeliefs. Highlighting the dictatorial psycho political nature of Leontes, Greenblatt explains that such a tyrant "does not need to traffic in facts or supply evidence. He expects his accusation to be enough. If he says that someone has been betraying him, or laughing at him or spying on him, it must be the case. Anyone who contradicts him is either or liar or an idiot" (123). Seen through new historical perspective as pointed by Greenblatt, Leontes becomes more prominent to the readers and audiences of the twenty first century political and economic as well as popular culture dominated by megalomaniacs. But something that needs to be highlighted here is the tide that Camillo and Paulina create. Unlike Leontes, Camillo and Paulina mainly act sanity. They save not only their life but also that of Leontes's from a complete ruin. They provide a joyful turn to Leontes's love and life at the end of the play. No sooner does Leontes commit mistakes and loses his sanity, Paulina and Camillo hold the rein. This shift is significant.

At times Leontes fails to check his own thoughts and is about to harm others, then and there do rise Camillo and Paulina to rescue would- be victims, Polixenes and Hermione. As the ill-temper state of mind drags Leontes's chariot called life, visionary do become Paulina and Camillo. Contrary to Leontes' 'paranoic' state of mind, they take a hold of it in a wise manner. Camillo in no time does realize that Leontes is under the influence of 'diseased opinion', and to argue against him is bound to be futile. Much trained is the horse that Camillo rides. It decides to avoid the deadly course that Leontes's horse had expected. With a clearer state of mind, Camillo along with Polixenes escape to Bohemia. They prove that by not following Leontes, they avoid greater casualties. But in the meantime, they don't boycott Leontes. Instead they wait for the right time to herald. While one loses the mindful state; there rise individuals who achieve it. This places our life and society in a comparatively safer order.

Sans mindful state, Leontes becomes a victim of his own fancy. The Middle Length Discourse of Buddha reiterates the message that ill thinking is a violence. Wrong speech is violence (273-4). Once given to this, Leontes takes wrong actions: he orders Camillo to poison and kill Polixenes. He orders to imprison the innocent Queen and orders his newly born baby to be abandoned to death. It is too late before he realizes his mistake and is doomed to suffer for sixteen years. Analyzing such state of consequences, The Dhammapada states, "The evil doer-may be happy as long as he does not reap what he has sown, but when he does, sorrow overcomes him" (109). Thus, Leontes loses his son, Mamillius. Yet another shocking news comes that the

Queen, Hermione is dead. The Delphi oracle predicts that he is bound to remain heirless, and is doomed to suffer till the date his lost heir is found. The temporal and spatial lane he is destined to march through emanates from the invisible thoughts sprouted in his mind. The horse he trusted for a certain time being heralds a shocking reality in his life.

But the fact that one is always provided a chance to return to the right track makes his life bearable and also meaningful. Over clouded may one become in his mind, wrong speech and action may he commit, but there is always some chances available to her or him to recover. Submission to the oracle from Delphos is probably one such significant intervention that motivates him to place his cart on track. The oracle of Delphos halts his horse gone out of control. It is then and there it stops. The realization that human beings may commit mistake but not the gods brings new order in his life. This fear or trust on divinity turns the tide. Once the Oracle is read over in his court in front of all lords, he realizes the mistakes he has committed so far. This is the point the horse that had gone wild for some days comes to a halt. Leontes looks back in regret but in vain. There is no return. He has no option other than train his horse to take him to a spiritually safer lane.

The journey Leontes had already set under the spell of ignorance, the 'unwholesome' actions he had already taken and the disasters he had already created, take him to another shore of life in no time. Swimming safe across the bank is a difficult task. But the way bad actions overshadow the good ones; good or 'wholesome' actions can also weaken the spell of its opposites. The recovery too is inevitable the way the process of destruction takes pace. Explaining the take The Middle Length Discourses of Buddha has one connection between the rise and fall of spiritual values on human life, the translators and interpreters Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi write:

That dynamism is kamma, volitional action of body, speech, and mind. Those beings who engage in bad actions - actions motivated by the three unwholesome roots of greed, hate, and delusion - generate unwholesome kamma that leads them to rebirth into lower states of existence and, if it ripens in the human world, brings them pain and misfortune. Those beings who engage in good actions - actions motivated by the three wholesome roots of non-greed, non-hate, and non-delusion - generate wholesome kamma that leads them to higher states of existence and ripens in the human world as pleasure and good fortune. (45)

Leontes experiences dramatic changes in his life. The sixteen years pass. Several things happen in between. Leontes cleans his self as it was.

Confession by its nature enables him to discover the source of suffering, the direct and subtle relationship between inner and outer life and brings transformation in his self. Thus there is the arrival of his long lost daughter. So does his would be son-in-

law. There is the arrival of his long betrayed friend, Polixenes. So does his long lost confidant. The most important thing is that Queen he thought dead comes back to life. But the fact that he realizes his mistake, the cry he makes inside and the pain he goes through melts his ego. Revealing the secret power of undergoing confessional meditation, The Dhammapada states: “Those who humbly listen to it give up their vile actions, and completely get rid of the many vile actions they have done in the past. They gain happiness that they never had before, do not ever lose the happiness they now have...” (1). By training his mind through confession, Leontes has got rid of earlier self, understood the cause and effect of vile actions in life and earned spiritually a better life.

An individual who happens to commit mistakes in the state of ignorance, can also discover wisdoms. Evoking this dynamic quality of human actions in life, The Dhammapada further remarks, “The good man may suffer as long as he does not reap what he has sown, but when he does, joy overcomes him” (109). Suffering the protagonist in the play has been going through finally lasts. Like the cloud in the sky, misunderstanding between him and his friends is cleared off. A reunion takes place. Leontes and Polixenes’s desire to live together becomes a reality. The separation, the dukkha and misunderstanding they had gone through in between turn out to be much needed things. Therefore, one’s mental state, the working of the mind and the condition he or she gets into are temporal experiences, “All created things are transitory; those who realise this are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to pure wisdom” (162), suggests The Dhammapada.

As stated earlier, the role Camillo and Paulina play to save situation from getting worse tells a dynamic nature of human society. Paulina is also aware of the damage that ill thoughts can bring in one’s own life. For that matter, she attains a larger than life attributes in the play. Theatrically speaking, she brings the statue back to life. She performs the role of a director and choreographer in that sense. She directs Perdita and Hermione’s movement. She is able to direct the course of the final part of play according to her plan. In this sense, she commands her own mind as it keeps on concentrating a single mission, to make Leontes realize his faults and honor the innocence of Hermione. Paulina designs it not as a game of revenge but as a workshop or rehearsal Leontes is supposed to go before he is spiritually fit enough to live a happy life. As a human being, Paulina is aware of the rightful action. She does not only know right time and right place to intervene, she is also aware of the temporal dimension of the cloud that has overpowered Leontes’s mind. She waits for the moment when the cloud in his mind gives away to the light. Concerned more about the scale of suffering Hermione has gone through and the justice she needs to be given, Paulina remains focused on her target. She acquires this superior quality of mind mainly because she knows the secret that mind is the source of joy and suffering in life. Second, she is aware the value of serving the people in need. Third, she is aware of the need of acting out right action on right time and right place. Such power that Paulina is able

to generate is praiseworthy. This is the message that The Dhammapada suggests to the meditation practitioners, the Bhikshus: “Train your eyes and ears; train your nose and tongue. The sense are good friends when they are trained. Train your body in deeds, train your tongue in words, train your mind in thoughts. This training will take you beyond sorrow” (192). Paulina tries her words to bring Leontes out of the grip of his ill thoughts by presenting a newly born daughter to him. When this approach fails, she dramatizes the situation. She sends the news that the Queen Hermione is dead. Almost like a demi goddess, she watches Leontes in the state of suffering. Herself a widow, she transforms her pain to rescue the other, the Queen in this case. She detaches herself from her personal loss and grievances. And, once she is sure that Leontes has earned new self, she directs the game of unveiling the statue. This can be taken as the unveiling of Maya, the state of greater reality that we all need to accept in our life.

Camillo too is aware of the tricks mind can play in individual's life. No sooner had he found Leontes's ill mental state, how entrapped is he into the world of this mental state, Camillo took the decision to rescue Polixenes and himself. Had he stayed there with Leontes and followed his command, more horrible situation would have taken place. Instead of following the ill-tempered master, he follows his own master, the mind. This decision of Camillo is the right action taken at right time and place. He does the same sixteen years later in Bohemia when Polixenes starts behaving like a tyrant. He too was about to force Camillo to think and perceive situation the way Leontes had expected him to do sixteen years earlier. But Camillo, like his would be wife Paulina, stands firm on his belief, on a clear state of mind. Like Paulina, he sacrifices his personal happiness for the sake of justice and reunion of these old friends. In this sense, both of them, Paulina and Camillo make their life meaningful by serving the people in need. Economically and socially they may belong to the rank that serves the King and the Queen, the Prince and the Princess. But spiritually, they belong to a superior rank. Individually, they take the ship to the right direction. Not only that they complete the journey in the right manner. They pass on a right kind of message to the people that when one's mind fails, instead of taking benefit out of it, others should try to help the person get his peace back, mind back. This is the way one orders human society.

Written at two different times and places with different purposes, Buddha's teachings as included in the texts referred earlier and The Winter's Tale help us understand not only the secrets of mind and the spiritually guided life but also the nature of human society. As discussed above, human beings may achieve peaceful mental state, a state that brings joy for the achiever as well as his or her fellow creatures. The corridors of suffering that ill-thoughts or mental states take human beings often are terrible. But the fact that such journey can be developed as occasions to achieve subtle realizations about life in the universe, and such realizations can play significant role to protect humanity. This paper wants to conclude with an emphasis that society remains in flux the way The Winters's Tale unfolds: When some go crazy; there emerge others who act sane and vice versa. The message is clear that human beings are tortured with the mind

they are given to. They need to read the stories it tells, watch and understand its modus operandi. They need to watch it; listen to the tune it plays: “Because you didn’t listen to it, all of you have again and again had to experience, with no peace of mind, the intense and unremitting pain of being burned and of other torments in the great abyss, that is, in the hells and other realms like them. So listen to it with most careful attention!” (1), *The Dhammapada* suggests us. *The Winter’s Tale* since a play meant to be performed tells its audience that their society consists of individuals caught in various mental states. Together, these travelers form a caravan. The horse like mind may derail one, but chances are that others can manage to keep their horse on track. Some train their horse well. Above all, the most superior horse is the compassionate one. The audience come to realize that socially they may belong to different ranks but the secret about life is that the human with compassionate heart takes care of his or her own mind is the happiest and successful persons despite all gender, economic class and merits. It is him and her who remains in demand. Thus, this paper concludes the discussion that bringing *The Dhammapada* and other Buddhist texts and *The Winter’s Tale* to a single space enables one to articulate the tale of mind and society that has remained the source of fiction and philosophy, play and rituals and so on for ages.

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