

The Sun Still Shines Behind the Clouds

Written by Nirmala

Friday, 04 November 2011 15:24

Q: How do you respond if you happen to see someone molesting someone else? Is it okay to just let someone harm others? It seems that if we were enlightened, we would perceive everything as one, so we would just let someone harm others without attachment.

A: This is a common question because it's confusing to the mind when two opposite things are both true. So while it is true that everything is one and there's nothing that can harm consciousness, it's also true that you can act without attachment in a situation such as the one you described.

Here's a simple metaphor to illustrate how two opposite things can be true: On a rainy day, you experience thick clouds and some rain. And yet, above the clouds, the bigger truth is that the sun is still shining. I call it a "bigger truth" because the sun shines on the entire earth, not just on the clouds above your head, and the sun shining is more constant and longer lasting than a rainstorm. However, just because it's true that the sun is still shining (behind the clouds) during a rainstorm doesn't mean you go out in your bathing suit and some sunscreen to work on your tan! Your experience of clouds and rain is still real, so you may want to wear a raincoat instead.

When it comes to the hurt and violence in this world, the bigger truth is that consciousness is not harmed by the pain and suffering. Yet while this is true, the pain is still real, and it still may be possible to do something to prevent or stop the violent or hurtful act or at least to help soothe or heal a person who's already suffered from such harm.

Knowing the bigger truth, that there is no lasting harm, can free you to respond to whatever is happening. There's nothing to lose, so why not help someone if you can? The value of this bigger perspective is that it can allow you to see the hurt and violence but not be traumatized or overwhelmed by it. When we don't see the bigger truth, our reaction to the pain in the world is often to avoid or deny it because the pain can seem too horrible to acknowledge. Seeing the bigger truth allows us to better respond to pain and is also likely to make us more willing to respond.

Realizing that love and peace are still present even in such situations—that they are always here "behind the clouds"—unlocks our capacity to be compassionate toward the victims of violence and even toward the perpetrators. This may allow us to stop someone from being violent in a loving and compassionate way. In contrast, responding to violence with more

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violence usually just breeds more violence.

When it rains, it's not the end of the world. The sun is still shining and will eventually come out from behind the clouds. You don't need to overreact to the rain, while you still might take appropriate actions to stay dry. And even if you do get wet, it's often not that big a deal.