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The Heart Awakened

Three Essays

Eileen Siriwardhana

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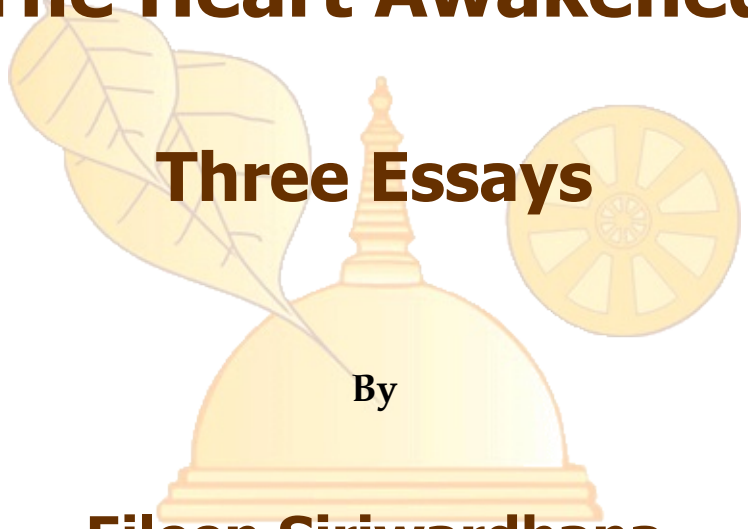

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The Heart Awakened

Muditā

Muditā means appreciative joy at the success and good fortune of others. Evaluation of achievement is a precursor to muditā, and appreciation a component of muditā. Seeing the good in others and learning to recognise and admire what good there is, is what muditā tacitly implies. Laughter and exhilaration are not characteristics of muditā. Muditā is joy and appreciation flowing quietly out of the core of one's heart towards others like the waters from a spring flowing outwards from the bowels of the earth. Spontaneous and sincere participation in another's glorious hour is possible only when the quality of muditā is developed to its fullest.

Genuine joy in the prosperity of others is indeed a rare quality. The virtue of muditā may be best noticed at work in the joy of parents over the success of their offspring, and in the genuine ecstasy of teachers over the success of their pupils, particularly in the latter situation when the threat of the younger eclipsing the

older is always imminent. While it is easy to practise muditā within the narrow circle of one's family and friends, to identify oneself with the joys and triumphs of outsiders requires deliberate effort. Yet the capacity for doing so is rooted in man's nature. Smiling faces of adults make children respond readily with their own smiles. This potential in the child should be nurtured and activated by parents and educationists. For the seed of muditā planted early in a child will grow and blossom and bear fruit in his adolescence and in his adult life. To some extent, man is a product of his environment—with this in mind, adults, parents, teachers and wardens who handle children should be of a cheerful disposition and an appreciative nature.

If a child lives with criticism,
He learns to condemn;

If a child lives with hostility,
He learns to fight;

If a child lives with ridicule,
He learns to be shy;

If a child lives with jealousy,
He learns to feel guilty;

If a child lives with tolerance,
He learns to be patient;

If a child lives with encouragement,

He learns confidence;

If a child lives with praise,
He learns to appreciate;

If a child lives with fairness,
He learns justice;

If a child lives with security;
He learns to have faith;

If a child lives with approval,
He learns to like himself;

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,
He learns to find love in the world.

Latent in man are both noble characteristics as well as vicious tendencies. It is strange that the vices latent in man seem almost natural and spontaneous, whereas the dormant virtues have to be brought to the surface with great effort. As one advances in years, activating and developing the potential of muditā becomes more and more difficult—though not impossible. Seeds will not take root in hard and crusty soil. One has to loosen and soften the soil if one expects shoots from seeds. In children the heart is tender and seeds planted therein will take root early and grow fast. So the best time to activate and develop the positive and saintly tendencies which lie dormant in every human being is

during the tender years. When a child receives praise and approbation, he will naturally learn to give it to others for he knows the joy of recognition and appreciation.

Envy and jealousy are the chief opponents of muditā, or appreciative joy. These noxious qualities arise partly out of a lack of confidence in one's achievements and one's capacity to achieve. Dislike, boredom—nuances of the Pali term *arati* —may be considered as enemies of muditā. The opposite sterling virtues which can vanquish these enemies are loving kindness, mettā, and compassion, karuṇā. Muditā is placed third in the listing of the brahma vihāras, for muditā is the natural outcome of the two preceding benign mental states. Mettā and karuṇā are the forces that urge one to alleviate the sufferings of others with purely altruistic motives, expecting nothing in return—not even gratitude. What matters to the Buddhist is the little bit of joy he has brought to another's heart by relieving him of even a little bit of sorrow, of suffering. Little do people realise how a kind word, a warm smile, a loving touch can act as a balm to a sorrowladen heart. We can now see how muditā becomes a natural result of mettā and karuṇā.

Too often people are much more ready to sympathise with the misfortunes of others than to rejoice with them in their good fortune. Where is a

definition of a friend: “What are friends? Are they not dear sweet people who abuse you behind your back and take an inward deep pleasure in hearing of your faults and misfortunes?” We have to take ourselves to task whenever we recognise these psychological perversities within us, and with great effort try to eradicate these unwholesome tendencies which seem to be deeprooted.

We have to be honest with ourselves and look within. Whenever traces of envy or jealousy enter our hearts, we should recognise the emotion as one which is unwholesome. We should also make an effort not to let it take hold of us. Let us ask this question: Why are we envious? Because someone possesses something we do not. Why do we not have that which we want, that which would give us joy? The answer lies in our own kamma. In the light of the Buddha Dhamma no one is to blame but ourselves. The greatest sorrow for a woman is the inability to bear a child. Why accumulate more bad kamma by envying those who have children? Unwholesome states of mind such as hatred and anger are said to be the causes of infertility. So why promote such a state in a future birth too by continuing that evil train of thought? This line of thinking, of arguing, needs very great effort. It is not easy. That is why the Buddha praised effort, viriya, as a noble virtue. “If it were not possible to do good I

would not tell you to," said the Buddha. This mode of thinking helps to eradicate delusion—moha. The source of all unwholesome kamma is ignorance of moha. When the veil of moha is lifted, one sees clearly that craving is the source of all sorrows. Craving gives rise to jealousy, envy, covetousness, avarice, greed—all enemies of muditā.

Let the fertile woman not look down upon her less fortunate sister who is denied the great joy of motherhood. Let not the one endowed with beauty scorn her plainlooking sister. Let not the wealthy insult the poor. After all, we must remember that this earthly existence is but a short sojourn in our journey through saṃsāra. The Buddha says there is no one on earth who has not in a previous existence been a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, a child to us. So let us suffuse the whole world with mettā, with karuṇā and with muditā. This is why the brahma vihāras are described as *appamaññā* —illimitables (all embracing). They are socalled because they find no barrier or limit. They embrace all living beings.

Jealousy can poison a man's system, mar his character, and ruin his social relationships. And what is life but a series of relationships? It is only in death that we are alone. Today jealousy and greed for power have poisoned the mind of the world. We now witness jealousy on a global scale. We are destroying each

other and our home—the earth. The situation at the present is so very grave that we can no longer talk of individuals or groups or nations. We have to speak for Earth. Carl Sagan, the eminent astronomer, exasperated by the wanton destruction of our beautiful little planet and its resources asks, "Who speaks for Earth?" The practise of muditā never seemed to be as important as in the present day. The forces of evil seem to have been unleashed in full measure in human hearts the world over.

Advances in science and technology have been of immense value to man's material progress and development, but the negative byproducts of this progress are truly frightening. Destruction of natural resources, pollution, unhealthy rivalry and dangerous competition have reached such colossal proportions that life on earth is threatened. Discoveries and inventions in the fields of science and technology should be for a better and more comfortable life. But now many of those discoveries' are a threat to life itself. It is indeed depressing that the irony of this situation is not considered with sufficient concern. The ills of the world are insidiously increasing so that there is a growing sense of cosmic gloom and defeatism.

Man's predicament as perceived by the modern poet, George Barker, is embodied in the following

words:

When will men again
Lift irresistible fists
Not bend from ends
But each man lift men
Nearer again.

Many men mean
Well: but tall walls
Impede, their hands bleed and
They fall, their seed the
Seed of the fallen.

See here the fallen
Stooping over stones, over their
Own bones, but all
Stooping doom beaten.

Whom the noonday wishes
Whole, whom the heavens compel,
And to whom pass immaculate messages,
When will men again
Lift irresistible fists
Impede impediments
Leap Mountains,
Laugh at Walls?

Looking on, dejected and dispirited, is not the solution. We have to struggle to save ourselves and

our planet. This is why institutions like the United Nations Assembly exist. Though satisfactory results may not always be forthcoming, the fact that while a section is destroying, inventing weapons of hate, another section of mankind is arguing, demonstrating, petitioning for peace. As long as such forces opposing evil are in existence, there is hope. This means that there is still sympathy and love in men's hearts for their fellow beings. So we must be hopeful. Conflict is eternal; conflict is natural. Conflict helps us to rediscover lost values. We must not see only hatred in conflict. Conflict is the natural prerequisite of a satisfactory solution.

A section of the world today is enveloped by the thick veil of delusion. Hence their inability to see the truth. Failure to perceive the Truth is delusion. So it is with persistent effort and enduring patience that those who wish to be noble and serviceable must sublimate themselves and serve humanity, both by example and by precept. The cultivation of muditā and the practise of this virtue can relieve humanity of the suffering it has brought upon itself. Those with right understanding must by personal example work out salvation for themselves and for their fellow beings.

Diligent practise of muditā will make a person more amenable, flexible, and understanding. He will learn to live outside himself. He will experience a new kind

of happiness, the joy of sharing. This virtue will elevate him to eradicate the cankers of jealousy and egoistic craving; "We" and "ours" will be substituted for "me and "mine." Wholesome camaraderie will build up, and he will gradually embrace the whole world with loving kindness— *sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā*. The ego will gradually disintegrate, and he will gain insight into *anattā*, the Buddha's central doctrine. The fetters of attachment to self will break first, and with it all other fetters of attachment, which will lead him gradually toward renunciation.

The Buddha advocates the sharing not only of material resources, but of spiritual resources as well. The transferring of merit to our dear departed ones is a truly beautiful sharing. Our loved ones who are no more with us physically feel such a sense of joy in the thought that they are not forgotten; the joy that accrues to them by our enlightened acts is *anumodana*.

Mankind is on the eve of a nuclear war. Sure and certain destruction will be the fate of the human race if war breaks out. Now is the hour to muster benign forces within the human heart on a global scale. The virtues of *mettā, karuṇā, muditā* and *upekkhā* must be practised to combat the degrading forces of greed and hatred which cause dangerous divisions. Once the sparks of divinity in men's hearts are released, all divisions of creed, colour, religion and race will recede

into insignificance. Then only one creed will be in evidence: the creed of humanity. So let us activate, cultivate, and develop the sublime qualities—brahma vihāras. These powers hidden within the human heart are yet untapped, yet it is through these powers that humanity can be saved. This seems to be the way—the only way out of the present entanglement.

> "The inner tangle and the outer tangle—
> This generation is entangled in a tangle.
> And so I ask Gotama this question:
> Who succeeds in disentangling this tangle?"

The answer of the enlightened One given centuries ago embodies the solution to the present tangle. It is, in fact, the answer to every generation—past, present, future. "He who succeeds," says the Buddha, "in disentangling this tangle, is the wise man, established well in virtue, who has developed consciousness and understanding."

Mettā

Mettā is a sincere wish for the welfare and genuine happiness of all beings, without exception. It means that which softens one's heart— a friendly disposition. "Just as a mother protects her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so should one cultivate loving kindness towards all living beings." It is not the passionate love of the mother that is stressed here, but her sincere selfless wish for a genuine welfare of her child.

Mettā transcends all boundaries of caste, class, race and religion. It is limitless in size and range (*appamaññā*); it has no barriers, no discriminations.

Think of the number of instances during a day when your actions are coloured by discrimination. When your unfortunate servant boy accidentally breaks an article, you shout at him. When your own child does it, you tolerate it. That servant boy is also somebody's child who, through bad kamma, has come under your roof to do your menial work—to do your bidding.

When you strike a blow across your dog's back for trampling your flower bed, do you realise the unwholesome state of your mind at the moment of such action? You may even be a person who recites the gāthās and the suttas, who goes to the temple, who observes the Eight Precepts, who listens to sermons, who gives alms. But at the moment of such

discriminating actions you have turned away from the Dhamma.

At some time you may bide the time, waiting for an opportunity to take revenge on someone who has slandered you. During that period of waiting—please think of the Buddha. Enact in your mind's eye the story of Ciñcā Māṇavikā or the courtesan Sundarī. Then your little embarrassments and heartaches will fade into insignificance.

Mettā is described as a divine state (*brahmavihāra*) which cannot coexist with anger or hatred.

> "Hatreds never cease through hatreds in this world.
> Through love alone they cease.
> This is an eternal law."
>
> (Dhammapada verse 5)

Goodwill, loving kindness, benevolence and universal love are suggested as the best renderings of the Pali word *mettā*. A point to be clarified here is that mettā is not synonymous with ordinary affection. The world cannot exist without mutual affection. Between parents and children, between husbands and wives, between teachers and pupils, between friends, exist varying degrees of affection. This affection is natural, and mettā has to be cultivated. A benevolent attitude

is the chief characteristic of mettā. One who practises mettā is constantly interested in promoting the welfare of others— not only in his family and friends. Such a person is sincere when he says: "May all beings be happy."

Another very important point that should be clearly understood is that in exercising mettā, do not ignore yourself. How often do you say, "Oh, I got so angry with myself" or "I can never forgive myself"? Some hasty words or actions on your part fill you with resentment towards yourself. Remorse, though a fine corrective, is an extreme form which can bar your progress when indulged in again and again. There are times when you may even make yourself mentally and physically ill. So the most important person to make friends with is yourself.

Remorse, regret, diffidence and hopelessness are negative tendencies the existence of which can never result in a friendly disposition towards oneself. Mettā is a positive quality. Unless you feel friendly toward yourself, you cannot be friendly towards others. To the world outside you may appear to be welldisposed towards others and give the impression of possessing a benevolent, magnanimous nature. But be aware of yourself. Be honest with yourself. Honesty is the starting point towards selfpurification.

"To thine own self be true
And it must follow as the night the day
Thou canst not be false to any other man."

(Shakespeare)

All men have their frailties. What is meant by making friends with oneself does not mean that we expect to find within ourselves only that which is good and perfect. We talk about understanding people. Let us understand ourselves first. Let us recognise our strong points and feel satisfied about them. Let us recognise our failings, and strive towards lessening or eradicating them.

"Whoever looks for a friend without
imperfections will never find what he seeks."

(Cyrus the Great)

"A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter.
He that has found one has found a treasure."

(Sirach 6:14)

"He who throws away a friend is as bad as he
who throws away his life."

(Sophocles)

Let us not throw away our lives by throwing away

that friend that is in us.

"I" or "myself" should be the central or starting point. Mettā radiates from oneself to others, so it is very important to feel a sense of goodwill, friendliness, wellbeing towards oneself. This is a subtle point which has to be clearly understood.

The Buddha radiated mettā equally towards his adversary Devadatta, Yasodharā his royal wife, and Paṭācārā the demented woman, his royal father King Suddhodana and Sopāka the humble lowcaste youth.

Mettā then should be extended towards friend, foe and mere acquaintances alike. The identification of oneself with all beings (*sabbe sattā*), making no difference between oneself and others is the culmination of mettā. The ideas of "me" and "mine" are building blocks of barriers. Mettā dissolves barriers and loosens all constraints. With the diligent practise of mettā, division evaporates and humanism is realised. Such a mind is free from ill will, and this freedom is bliss or *sukha*.

Ill will is the antithesis of mettā. Anger, hatred, aversion are related qualities. Mettā cannot coexist with such unwholesome attitudes. Disparaging, condemning and belittling others is possible only through ill will. Pointing out another's faults with the intention of leading him towards good does not mean

a lack of mettā. Parents, teachers and elders often have to resort to various methods of correction and reform where the young are concerned. But one has to be very watchful when one is engaged in such activity. The motive has to be analysed carefully. Elders sometimes react in anger. At such moments one must question oneself: Was it to avert a disaster to the other that one acted so? Or was it merely giving vent to one's own anger which oppressed one?

A mother who could not convince her son that the path through the jungle was unsafe and that he should take a safer route exclaimed in despair, "May a bear maul you!" The son departed and the mother radiating mettā towards her son, hoped and prayed that no harm should befall him. Though the jungle was infested with wild animals, the loving kindness which radiated from the core of the mother's heart towards her son was a weapon against the fierce jungle beasts. Mettā, one has to understand, is a powerful weapon against evil—and protects one from many pitfalls in life.

Mettā is a constructive healthy force with the power of combating hostile influences. Just as anger can produce toxic effects on the system, benign thoughts can produce soothing healthbringing physical effects. Many instances in the Buddha's life illustrate the fact that the peaceful thought vibrations of the Buddha

produced salutary effects, so much so that the intoxicated elephant Nālāgiri and the wild Aṅgulimāla were completely subdued. The magnetic power of mettā is indeed deeply rewarding. Metta has a liberating influence on the one who possesses it and on the one to whom it is extended.

In our daytoday lives with its trials, tribulations and complexities, the art of being friendly is fast disappearing. We act like automatons. We are so wrapped up in ourselves, in our own affairs, that we hardly think it is necessary to spend time over anything that is not connected directly to ourselves and our affairs.

We must teach our young the value of a friendly disposition. We must do it by example more than by precept. In our homes, in our schools, in our places of work, if this simple quality of friendliness is allowed to pervade the atmosphere, our corner of this earth can be a little haven—a true home.

Let us fill our hearts with mettā, and let us make our hearts a home where peace and love and friendship will dwell.

> "I read within a poet's book
> A word that starred the page:
> 'Stone walls do not a prison make
> Nor iron bars a cage!'

Yes, that is true, and something more,
You'll find wherever you roam
That marble floors and gilded walls
Can never make a home.
But every home where Love abides
And Friendship is a guest
Is surely home, and home sweet home
For there the heart can rest."

(Richard Lovelace)

Getting Hold of Myself

I told myself never to do certain things:

Never to fly into a rage when things have gone wrong,
But something is simmering inside me;
Then I try to get hold of myself
But I can't!

Never moan and lament over loss and disaster,
But something is writhing inside me;
Then I try to get hold of myself

But I can't!

Never be elated over triumphs and victories,
But something is dancing inside me;
Then, too, I try to get hold of myself,
But I can't!

Exasperated,
I try and I strive
But I can't!

I just can't get hold of myself,
Can you?
If you can, please let me know how.
Yes, I can.
And you can, too,
If you turn to the Buddha.

"Irrigators lead the waters.
Fletchers bend the shafts.
Carpenters bend the wood.
The wise control themselves."

(Dhp 80)

Just as a watercourse is dammed and directed through channels towards a chosen direction, so too the mind must be bent and consciously directed towards good, towards virtue, towards righteousness.

To amass wealth, to dig up the treasures from the bowels of the earth, man makes laborious efforts and spends enormous sums of money, but to dig up the invaluable treasures of the mind, man makes little or no effort. But to make the effort man has first to realise, he has first to understand the mysterious and mighty potentialities hidden within his mind.

On the other hand, if, though well aware of the natural destructive forces within him, man makes little or no effort to curb them, he thereby causes untold misery to himself and to others.

Latent in man are both saintly characteristics and destructive tendencies. It is strange that too often the vices latent in man seem almost natural and spontaneous, whereas the dormant virtues have to be brought to the surface with great effort. It is worth noting that every vice possesses its opposite, a noble virtue which may not appear to be natural and automatic, yet which lies within the range of every person.

And so man lives enveloped in miseries of various types. Man is never happy, never satisfied, always frustrated, always wanting something more, something new. His mind is constantly in turmoil, and the misfortune is that he thinks that this has to be the natural condition common to all. This is delusion, or

moha.

"Blind is the world.
Few are those who clearly see.
As birds escape from a net,
few go to the blissful state."

(Udāna)

It is a pity that man does not realise that all these fears, sorrows, phobias and miseries are mindmade—and can be eliminated. A man can live in a constant state of bliss and joy devoid of unnecessary sufferings and live life to its fullest if only he would live the word of the Buddha, for the word of the Buddha embodies peace. This is why the arahats often uttered:

"Calm in mind,
Calm in speech,
Calm in deed,
who rightly knowing is wholly freed,
perfectly peaceful and equipoised."

(Dhp 317)

A desert traveller with parched lips and burning soles will be gladdened on hearing that an oasis is not far off. But he will not experience real joy until he tastes its waters with his lips, and dips his soles in the cool waters. In like manner the word of the Buddha

gladdens our hearts, but we should not stop until we have tasted the bliss of that noble state which is the panacea, the only panacea, for all the ills of the world.

> "There is no medicine comparable to the
> Dhamma.
> Taste of it.
> Drink it, O monks."
>
> (Dhp 205)

The Dhamma is to be lived, not merely to be read about or listened to. Listen. Think. Practise.

In our daytoday lives, in the course of being engaged in our daily chores, we should think of the innumerable times when we have neglected the word of the Buddha. Yet the incense chamber of the Buddha should be created within our hearts, and that fragrance must pervade every thought, every word, every action of our waking life.

"Purify your mind," said the Blessed One. Now think of the numberless unwholesome thoughts that daily pollute the mind. We speak and we act impulsively, rashly. Our words and our actions are often harsh; we cause pain of mind to others, which in turn brings on remorse. A whole train of unwholesome thoughts are unleashed as a result of our inability to control our mind. We get angry. That

anger even results in chemical changes in the body which can be injurious to our health, and to the wellbeing of others. And then we repent for a lifetime a few words uttered impulsively.

So, realising the unhappiness we bring upon ourselves and the suffering we cause others, we must first understand and accept the fact that we are not on the right path. What is the remedy? Do not let the mind drift. Take hold if it. Cultivate it. What is cultivation? It is meditation. It is a process of mind cleansing. What are the steps leading to purification of the mind, which is the heart of the Buddha's message?

1. To know the mind—that is so near to us; and is yet so unknown.
2. To shape the mind—that is unwieldy and obstinate, and yet may turn to pliant.
3. To free the mind—that is in bondage all over, and yet may win freedom here and now. [1]

To know the mind one has to watch it from moment to moment. Take a few minutes off your daily chores and sit down in a quiet place and be mindful of your thoughts. Watch carefully the thought processes coursing incessantly through your mind like the rising and falling away of the ocean waves, but continuous—in a neverending flow they arise and they fall away. Recognise each thought as pleasant or unpleasant, as

the nature of the thought may be. We have to be honest with ourselves. We must recognise jealousy as jealousy, know it to be unwholesome, cast it aside and substitute its antidote or opposite—which is appreciative joy or *muditā*.

We can gradually increase the period of watching by a few minutes each day. After some time we will find that when watching and perceiving, all shades and nuances of thought pass through our mind. With practise, this process will become automatic, natural and effortless, even while we are engaged in our daily activities. This is as it should be—a very desirable condition for our wellbeing, for then we will be constantly mindful. An action performed with mindfulness will be a skilful action. The result, or *vipāka*, of such action will be pleasant and good. So constantly our mind will be suffused with satisfaction, joy and bliss.

Let us look at a few of the common unwholesome states which too often pollute our minds:

Anger is a destructive vice which can be subdued with loving kindness or *mettā*.

Aggression is another vice that is responsible for much human suffering, errors and atrocities. Its antidote is compassion or *karuṇā*.

Jealousy poisons one's system. It has a corroding

effect on a person like rust on metal. It will destroy a person. Appreciative joy or *muditā* is the remedy.

There are other universal characteristics that upset the equilibrium of man. They are attachments to the pleasurable and aversion to the nonpleasurable. The opposite force is equanimity, or *upekkhā*, which alone can combat these two subtle but most prevalent defilements ever present in the mind.

Impregnated in the vices mentioned are the germs of a dreaded disease which seems to be taking its toll of many human lives today. Selfdestruction, depression, a sense of hopelessness, despair, gloom, pessimism, meaninglessness of life, are some of the symptoms of this dreaded disease which leads to so much unhappiness. The disease is ignorance.

The cure for the disease is the substitution of the opposite virtues for each of the latent vices. This will lead to the recognition of the beauty of life, its worthwhileness, its purposefulness. The substitution of wholesome pleasant thoughts is a recognised form of mental therapy. These virtues tend to elevate man. If cultivated with diligence, man will realise that the earth is such a beautiful place, that human life is noble, and that it is still possible to gain peace for oneself and for others.

Notes

1. *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, by Nyanaponika Thera, BPS, Kandy **[Back]**

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