

## **Those who walk away**

There is a short story by Ursula Le Guin in which she describes the ideal society, a city called Omelas, where everyone has enough to eat and is moderately happy with no serious worries. Then she asks the reader to imagine that the happiness of that place is directly dependent upon the abject misery of one child and that nothing whatsoever can be done about this. As each of the people in the city becomes aware of this he or she handles it in a different way - from despair to deliberate forgetting. And then there are those whose path takes them out of the city - those who walk away from Omelas.

The same basic story is illustrated in the Wheel of Life pictures. The great tree that bears fruit and flowers in the world of the devas has its roots in the world of the asuras who, in their frustration, are trying to cut down the whole tree. Bear in mind that the devas and asuras switch places throughout the aeons.

Whether we recognize it or not these stories are like mirrors held up to our own world where the security of one country seems to result in the misery of others - where the safety of a "white" man ends in the death of a young "black" man - where our quinoa and espresso come from countries where the locals cannot afford to consume what they grow. This is the koan - the conundrum of life in the Western world.

A koan is a basic spiritual question that is worked on by examining the various aspects, the opposites, but that cannot be solved through these opposites but only by taking on a whole new way of looking at the koan. This involves a recognition of things being "broken", of there being something greater than one's self and the necessity of working on one's self.

Things being "broken" is another way of putting the first Noble Truth of Suffering. The desire to do something about one's self arises out of this and the faith that there is something greater than one's self gives us the courage to proceed. This is the beginning of the life of training supported by precepts and nourished by meditation that is the only effective solution to the conundrum of living in this world.

This is ridiculously simple and infinitely profound at the same time - just try to cease from evil, do good and purify one's mind - this is the teaching of all Buddhas.