

# WHO ARE YOU?

By David Maurice

We must decide what we mean by “YOU”. Your name is not you because other people can have the same name and you can change your name. Your body is not you because your body is changing from second to second. Although it appears to be changing slowly it is certainly changing. Indeed when we say “my body” we are not quite right, for we do not own our own bodies, nor can we make them obey us in everything. Also, if we say “my body” it means that someone owns the body. Who is the owner? Who are “YOU”?

You are not your mind for your mind changes more quickly than your body. You do not think in the same way as you thought last year. Sickness or weather or even what you eat, can change the way you think.

The question as to whether there was really a permanent “You” or person, puzzled many wise men. Some of them said that there was a little man or “soul” made of very fine material like air, in the body. They thought that this “Soul” had a separate life.

The Buddha showed that this is not so. He showed that these people who believed in a permanent, unchanging soul are wrong. He proved that they are wrong also when they say there is a permanent “God”. Many people have believed that there is a permanent God Almighty or Holy Ghost or some other unchanging God. Since the world began there have been thousands of these Gods believed in by different people. All of these Gods are only ideas in the minds of men, so they are all a little different from one another just as men’s minds are all a little different one from another. It is man who makes gods, not a God who makes man.

The smallest germ or insect is constantly changing and must perish. The biggest animal must die. The Devas or Angels must pass away. No God, no man, can live forever.

The Great God must someday fall from His heaven. He will then become a man or an animal or a ghost or a devil, depending on his deeds in many a past life, and another being that has been in the man-world will take his place. This has happened before and it must always happen. Perhaps someday you will become

the so-called God. If so, you will have had many changes in between. Man is constantly changing, changing in body, in mind and in character. Take your own case in this present existence. You were born from a tiny seed too small to see without a microscope. This seed was inside your mother and there entered into it some of the essence of your father. Because there was the right amount of heat and favourable condition, the germ of life, the being to be born, the real, but changing “You”, entered and thus your present body began.

At first you were a tiny spot of jelly, with food from your mother’s body you grew day by day. You passed through various stages, changing all the time. Your shape changed as it grew. At one time you looked just like a little fish, later you looked just like a little pig, and then later still you looked just like a little monkey. Finally you grew into a human form and kicked and struggled inside your mother. Then at about the end of ten lunar months from the time your mother’s and father’s seed united, your struggles and your mother’s struggles brought you out into the world. It was not, however, the same “you” that it was ten months before.

You were weak and helpless and had to be carefully nursed by your mother, and your father probably had to work hard to provide food for you and your mother. Your body was weak and your mind not yet properly formed. Then day by day you became stronger and grew bigger. Now remember, you are not the same person the same “You” as you were when you were a tiny baby.

When you are fully grown, do you think that all the changes will stop? They will not stop. This you must note; changes never stop. Changes go on and on. Always there is change.

Some think that a beautiful world can be made here which will not change. They are wrong. Some people think that when they die they will go to a beautiful Heaven where there is no change. They also are wrong. The Buddha proved that everything that is compounded must change, must decay and break up and He said: “It is impossible that any single thing can be the Soul. There is only one changeless, and that is Nibbana, and as you see it is not a Heaven to be enjoyed by a “Soul” a “You”. It is much higher than this.

When you are grown up you will still continue to change. You may get fatter or you may get thinner. Your mind may improve or it may do the opposite. Later you will become old and weak. You will lose your teeth and your eyes will not be able to see clearly. Then you must die.

There is not so much difference as we think between birth and life and death and rebirth. There is some difference for; depending on our own deeds we may be reborn in a bad state or in a good state. God gained His place by his previous good deeds as a man. If he has done many good deeds he will become a man again after his power wanes. If he has done many good deeds in previous lives he will become a man again, yes, but if he has done many bad deeds in previous existences he may still fall into a hell-world. He cannot become free from all existence. Only by practising to make his mind grow can he become free from all evil existence.

Now even this highest being, the one we've been discussing, has until and unless he gains Nibbana, to go through "good" and "bad" "happy" and "unhappy" states. No god can save him, no devil can harm him. No god can save us and no devil can harm us unless we make the conditions for the higher being to help us or the lower ones, the evil ones, to harm us. We ourselves make those conditions by our deeds. Man is still the master of his fate or Kamma. You are the master of everything if you are the master of yourself.

Now we get back again to the question: "What are you?" This "you" is not the body, not the mind, not "vinnana" or consciousness: consciousness is changing all the time and the "you" is changing all the time.

What is this "You" and what is it that we call "Nibbana"? These two things the Buddha did not explain in full. Why did He not explain them? Because there were not words to explain them with: there are no such words now and there will not be such words in future. Why is this? Because these things are not to be explained in words since words are only tools made by us to explain ordinary things. Nibbana has been called "The Deathless" and "The extinction of greed, hate and delusion", but you cannot understand Nibbana just as you cannot understand what is "You" unless you practise Buddhist development of mind that makes the mind to grow.

"Vipassana" is a Pali word meaning "Insight" or deep and certain knowledge of the truth. Only Buddhist mental development for "Vipassana" can show you this truth.

When you practise this mental development, your mind and your body will change little by little. By your own efforts you will see clearer and clearer, deeper and deeper into the real Truth. Remember, too, only by living a moral life can you practise safely.

What is “moral”? As you know its opposite is immoral. Greed, anger and ignorance are immoral; and altruism, that is thinking for the good of other people, loving-kindness to all and enlightenment.

When we see the ordinary sight and think with ordinary minds we are like men who look at something in a thick fog or on a dark night. When we look with pure minds we are like the men of science who can guide an aeroplane or a ship through the thickest fog or on the darkest night using radar: but we can see millions of times clearer and better without any instruments when we have made our minds pure by our practice.

Now suppose you do not wish to or are unable to practise? Then study what you can of what the Buddha taught. Listen to men you know to be wise and moral. Do as much good in the world as you can, and as little harm as you can, and “good luck” will come to you, and some day, in this life or another, you will find the ability to practise and to gain Nibbana.

(The Buddhist)

