

## The Cycle of Suffering

As I walk into the gas station I see a young man,  
Cigarette in one hand, a cell phone in the other,  
“Hey, brother, can you spare me a dollar?” he says.  
I grimace and walk away without a single word.  
“What happened, you don’t like my looks?” he shouts back  
I don’t respond to his taunts.  
As I drive home, the young man’s face keeps coming back,  
Each time, the cortisol rush comes out strong,  
I am still angry and disturbed,  
Angry at the young man panhandling,  
upset at his swagger, disturbed at his attitude,  
but soon I find out, I am angry at myself, at my judgment,  
and how I brushed him aside.  
I tossed and turned and could not sleep,  
his face still haunting me,  
Guilt-ridden and ashamed the next day,  
I go back to where I had left the young man,  
To make amends if I could,  
But he was long gone,  
Frustrated once more,  
I try to put the thought of the young man on the back burner.

Back home after a long grueling day at the hospital,  
Exhausted, sweaty, and hungry,  
As I enter the house my wife says,  
“You forgot to take out the trash dump,  
It’s Wednesday, you know,  
You forgot to water the plants, the flowers are wilting.  
and you left the garage door open  
when you left in the morning!”  
The cortisol rush made its ugly presence once more,  
Anger was again at play,  
I did not say anything but it was written all over my face.  
Hours after I had calmed down, I still did not  
apologize to her out of hubris,  
the undercurrent of unhappiness  
Not dissipated still.  
Three days passed and I said to myself,  
“You know, I should have said sorry the other day!”  
“Forget it, man! You lost your chance a while ago,  
Save it for the next time!”

I walked into the patient's room,  
"Doc, how come I am still here  
five days after surgery,  
It was to be an outpatient procedure!  
I am draining pus from the wound,  
I think you messed up Doc! I am not a happy camper!".  
"Sir, infections do occur sometimes, you know,  
We will not let you go before it gets all better"  
The patient, upset and annoyed, retorts  
"I don't know, Doc, I can't say I won't sue you!"  
I changed the dressing, kept my cool,  
and bid him goodbye, and left the room  
The anger had come right back - that sassy remark  
"He would sue me"  
ricocheting off my face.

Smoking a cigarette was a great pleasure,  
As a young man and even as a surgical resident in the seventies.  
Things changed, I started running, and stopped the smokes, decades ago.  
But the craving for a puff  
Comes back rarely but it does,  
especially when the cortisol rules.  
And every now and then,  
I do succumb to the craving -  
Short-sighted though it is.

Many, many years ago,  
My mother passed away.  
When she got ill,  
Busy in practice, I did remote control,  
To manage her illness,  
Never had the selflessness to return home,  
and be hands on in her care.  
Driven by a solo practice and the lack of coverage,  
my mother took a back seat in the priority  
that I myself set.  
The guilt of those past blunders  
Still haunts me to this day.  
How could have I been so self-centered  
and focused on "me" alone?  
The feeling never dies.  
Random incidences and thoughts over the years,

Buried somewhere in the brain,  
Like a lacuna that only calcifies with time.  
Caught up with the self I envisioned myself to be -  
The self that I habitually identify as 'me'  
The self that is larger than life itself,  
The self that represents my mind and body -  
It is but an illusion, a creation of the senses:  
Body and form, the six senses providing the latticework of sensations,  
sensation leading to perception,  
and perception leading to conception  
of a self-lacking any substantiality.  
And then the reaction, all too well known,  
the bile that spurts out in a microsecond or  
Oozes even a year later.  
The anger, the aversion - a line in the sand of Karma,  
Or a chiseled mark on the psychic rock – holds steady,  
unless erased through a skillful effort of consciousness.

Clinging, grasping, craving, aversion,  
desires of the mind and body.  
In unison at work with the ego covertly and subliminally,  
are ever present and seemingly indomitable -  
A storehouse of sentient suffering  
From a time since the beginning.

The secession of suffering  
Comes only by breaking the cycle -  
This vicious cycle of samsara we are submerged in,  
And are surrendered to still.

Ignorance is at the core of this noxious mix,  
Enlightenment is its antidote.

Snipping through the samsaric clasp  
needs the sharp scissors of awareness -  
Awareness and Consciousness we were born with  
but failed to heed their presence in the turbulence  
Of the self-created delusion of mind and body.

May we then awaken to awareness,  
May we then wake up to consciousness,  
Leaving the garb of false self behind,  
And donning the sheer of awareness,  
That loosens the grip of the corporeal body  
And settles the turbid mind  
while in pursuit of enlightenment.

But enlightenment has its simpler meaning:  
Unperturbed in the middle of sadness,  
Stoical in the middle of pain,  
detached in the  
midst of worldliness,  
and compassionate to all sentient beings.

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