

Václav Havel



When Buddha died two and a half thousand years ago his ashes were brought to eight stupas, pagodas erected in eight places of this world, to remind the terrestrials to this day of the way in which Buddha controlled his mind. It is through this way of thought that he has left an indelible imprint on the memory of the human race. Thousands of pagodas, stupas and chortens have been built in many countries of Asia since then, commemorating this extraordinary man and harbouring relics of his followers and sacred objects. Thus, I see a pagoda as a message coming from the depth of the past ages to our immediate vicinity at a time which many have called a global crisis. At a time of AIDS and acute threats to the environment, a time when human rights can be violated with impunity and when a human life often seems to be worth less than the bullet which ends it.

But a pagoda is more than a message. It is at the same time, or rather first and foremost, a challenge. A challenge to give thought to what has happened to humankind when we see that the noblest ideas, which were for centuries giving the development of the human race a purpose and a direction, are now perceived as an unprofitable entertainment of oddities and eccentrics, and even misused in some parts of the world as an excuse for annihilating those who adhere to them. Paradoxically, it appears that with all our science, technology and information systems we are probably far from equalling our ancestors when it comes to our consciousness as inhabitants of the Earth. Lacking intuition, we are chasing false substitutes for the sense of life and are willing, for their sake, to break any law and any rule without being even aware of it.

I do not know whether, or how, our deeds may be measured somewhere beyond this world. When intuition recedes from our life, we are losing an important power to judge our actions ourselves.

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