

## “Be Nobody”

Excerpts from Chapter IV of *All of Us: Beset by Birth, Decay, and Death*. Twelve Dhamma Talks On Practice given on Parappuduwa Nuns Island by Sister Ayya Khema

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“In moments of turmoil, when one is either not getting the supremacy one wants or one feels really inferior, then all one desires is peace. Let it all subside again and neither the superiority nor the inferiority is very distinct, then what happens? Is it really peace one wants? Or does one want to be somebody special, somebody important or lovable?

A “somebody” never has peace. There is an interesting simile about a mango tree: a king went riding in the forest and encountered a mango tree laden with fruit. He said to his servants: “Go back in the evening and collect the mangoes,” because he wanted them for the royal dinner table. The servants went back to the forest and returned to the palace empty-handed and told the king: “Sorry, sir, the mangoes were all gone, there wasn’t a single mango left on the tree.” The king thought the servants had been too lazy to go back to the forest, so he rode out himself. What he saw instead of the beautiful mango tree laden with fruit, was a pitiful, be-draggled tree, that had been beaten and robbed of its fruit and leaves. Someone, unable to reach all the branches, had broken them and had taken all the fruit. As the king rode a little farther, he came upon another mango tree, beautiful in all its green splendor, but not a single fruit on it. Nobody had wanted to go near it, since there were no fruits, and so it was left in peace. The king went back to his palace, gave his royal crown and scepter to his ministers and said: “You

may now have the kingdom, I am going to live in a hut in the forest.”

When one is nobody and has nothing, then there is no danger of warfare or attack, then there’s peace. The mango tree laden with fruit didn’t have a moment’s peace: everybody wanted its fruit. If we really want peace, we have to be nobody. Neither important, nor clever, nor beautiful, nor famous, nor right, nor in charge of anything. We need to be unobtrusive and with as few attributes as possible. The mango tree which didn’t have any fruit was standing peacefully in all its splendor giving shade. To be nobody doesn’t mean never to do anything again. It just means to act without self-display and without craving for results. The mango tree had shade to give, but it didn’t display its wares or fret whether anyone wanted its shade. This kind of ability allows for inner peace. It is a rare ability, because most people vacillate from one extreme to another, either doing nothing and thinking “let them see how they get along without me” or being in charge and projecting their views and ideas.

It seems to be so much more ingrained in us and so much more important to be “somebody,” than to have peace. So we need to inquire with great care what we are truly looking for. What is it that we want out of life? If we want to be important, appreciated, loved, then we have to take their opposites in stride also. Every positive brings with it a negative, just as the sun throws shadows. If we want one, we must accept the other, without moaning about it.

But if we really want a peaceful heart and mind, inner security and solidity, then we have to give up wanting to be somebody, anybody at all. Body and mind will not disappear because of that, what disappears is the urge and the reaching out and the affirmation of the importance and supremacy of this particular person, called “me.” ...  
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In the world we live in, we can find people, animals, nature and man-made things. Within all that, if we want to be in charge of anything, the only thing we have any jurisdiction over, is our own heart and mind. If we really want to be somebody, we could try to be that rare person, the one who is in charge of his own heart and mind. To be somebody like that is not only very rare, but also brings with it the most beneficial results. Such a person does not fall into the trap of the defilements. Although the defilements may not be uprooted yet, he won't commit the error of displaying them and getting involved with them. There is a story about Tan Achaan Cha, a famous meditation master in North-East Thailand. He was accused by someone of having a lot of hatred. Tan Achaan Cha replied: "That may be so but I don't make any use of it."

An answer like this comes from a deep understanding of one's own nature, that's why we are impressed with such a reply. It's a rare person who will not allow himself to be defiled by thought, speech or action. That one is really somebody, and doesn't have to prove it to anyone else, mainly because it is quite obvious. In any case, such a person has no desire to prove anything. There's only one abiding interest and that's one's own peace of mind."

Full text of this Chapter and the talks in the *All of Us* collection is available online at:  
[www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/modern/khema/allofus.html#ch4](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/modern/khema/allofus.html#ch4)

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