

"BUDDHA IN ASHOKA"

By

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FADE IN:

ACT2: THE CONFRONTATION

EXT-ACO2 TERRACE- MORNING

(Maya, a fashion vlogger from a priveleged background, sits on a table to record the unboxing of a cosmetic product she received. She sees a man dressed in a basic fashion sitting on the grass and meditating. Intrigued she confronts the man)

MAYA

(reluctantly taps on Buddha's shoulder)

Hey! I'm Maya. A second year. I was working there and I saw you sitting on the grass. Couldn't help myself from coming to you? You know I'm also really into self-care and even I believe meditation is one of the best things you can do to help you deal with stress. Do you meditate every morning?

BUDDHA

I'd like to think of meditation not as something which needs to be a task in one's daily routine. Meditation and focusing is more of an approach towards life in general.

MAYA

(confused and slightly weirded out. Doesn't want to be rude)

Uhhh okay! Anyway, haven't really seen you around before. Are you a first year?

BUDDHA

Oh no. I don't study here.

MAYA

Ah makes sense. You don't look like an Ashokan freshman. (You certainly don't

dress like one.) I believe you're you a guest lecturer, are you?

BUDDHA

Maybe. In a sense, yes.

MAYA

'In a sense' fancy. So, what is your area of expertise. Oh, and I almost forgot to ask, what's your name?

BUDDHA

I go by many names. Some people call me Siddhartha. Others Gautam. But mostly, Buddha.

MAYA

(Giggles. Doesn't believe Buddha)

Huh. You are Gautam Buddha. 'the enlightened one'.

BUDDHA

Yes. I don't necessarily enjoy being called that. But you know, I don't hate it either.

MAYA

Of course. So, you're saying you're the person I was taught about in my Alex Watson's Indian Civ class.

BUDDHA

I believe so. I mean Alex is a good friend. I didn't know he taught about me in his class. But it makes sense. Maybe that's why he was so keen on having me here?

MAYA

Let me just catch up for a second. You're THE BUDDHA. Apparently, you're Alex Watson's friend. And you're in Ashoka because he called you to give a lecture here.

BUDDHA

No. I'm not here BECAUSE Alex called me here. I'm here to help the students get on the path towards enlightenment and escape the cycle of rebirth. Besides, your university is literally named after one of my biggest disciples, right? Wouldn't it make sense for me to be here?

MAYA

(sarcastically)

Of course. Of course. That makes perfect sense. You're here to show us the right way of life. But okay tell me this then, if you're the Gautam Buddha -the one who is detached from the material world and its pleasures, indifferent towards his circumstances- why bother putting in the effort to show delusional ones like me the path towards enlightenment in the first place?

BUDDHA

Because I'm compassionate. A part of living in accordance with *dharma* is showing compassion.

MAYA

Okay hang on for a second. If I am involved in activism or protests because I feel infuriated about issues like animal cruelty or gender discrimination, Buddhism says that my affection and compassion towards these animals or humans is futile. Why is it that my compassion is different from your compassion?

BUDDHA

It's simple. Your compassion is not wrong. Just that the compassion is misplaced. Your activism towards creating changes in the social structure in order to slightly improve lives of people would still not alleviate them from suffering in the wider context. You're failing to recognize that life in itself is the source of suffering. Eternal bliss comes when you escape this cycle of rebirth.

MAYA

(In disbelief, almost trivializing)

Oh, come on! You're saying that I'm supposed to give up on things which give me joy, which make me happy, even if it's temporarily, in the belief that requiting them will yield me some 'eternal bliss' after I'm dead. What if rebirth does not exist? What if I waste my ONLY shot at life and experiencing joy following your teachings? You can't prove to me with empirical evidence that rebirth exists and without it the philosophy of not seeking pleasure just, shatters.

BUDDHA

Perhaps proving that all living beings are manifestations of cosmic energy and when one dies the same energy is manifested in some other form is something which I can't prove within the context of your known and comprehensible science. But that's why another critical component of following *dharma* is showing faith. Showing faith in your life is essential if you want to achieve deathlessness.

MAYA

(annoyed)

Come on that's just stupid. You can't expect me to just have faith and let that

faith dictate my life. You said my compassion won't yield fruitful results because my activism was misplaced. What if my life doesn't yield fruitful results because my faith in your teachings and your dharma is misplaced? I'm supposed to live my life in accordance of something which can't be proved to me. And besides, even if I give rebirth the benefit of the doubt, what is this deathlessness? Isn't death what makes our lives worth living? Isn't deathlessness also, in a sense, lifelessness?

BUDDHA

Yes. Deathlessness is lifelessness. So what? It's almost funny that you say it as if it's something bad. You only paint this bleak picture of deathlessness because of your attachment towards the sensory and physical pleasures this life brings to you. But I hope you realize that all these pleasures are temporary and no matter how good you think your life is or how priveleged and well-off background you come from; suffering is inevitable.

MAYA

Suffering is inevitable. So what? What is this extreme and borderline irrational fear of suffering? Why is it that joy MUST be permanent in nature otherwise it's not joy?

BUDDHA

Oh, you're mistaken. Buddhism isn't based on the fear of suffering.

MAYA

Then it's based on a longing of the eternal bliss. You're no better than the rest of us. Infact, you're perhaps the biggest hedonist because all we seek are small pleasures but you seek an eternal bliss.

BUDDHA

Buddhism doesn't seek anything. That's the point. There's neither a fear of suffering nor a longing for eternal bliss. It's an acknowledgement of the fact that sources of this pleasure are temporary and hence showing indifference towards them.

MAYA

But then aren't there so many times when we know that the source of pleasure is temporary in nature and yet we're able to derive joy out of it. From knowing that my favorite song will end in 3 minutes to knowing that one day my parents are going to die, isn't embracing the impermanent nature of things better than abandoning things because they're impermanent. Same way why can't I just accept that I'll die one day and then go on to live my life to its fullest. And I don't know if it's just me but eternal bliss to me just somehow seems suffocating in a sense. Can joy even exist if we don't experience sorrow time to time? I mean I really like eating Nutella but if Nutella is all I eat then it won't yield me any bliss.

BUDDHA

The problem is still that your brain is wired in a manner that you derive joy if your circumstances suit you. The idea is to change this mindset and become a being who is blissful regardless of the state of his or her surroundings. And I'd like to emphasize that this indifference is not inaction. I mean at the end of the day I am trying to show you why being an ascetic is a rational approach towards life but whether you agree with me or not is not something which I'd let regulate my happiness.

MAYA

I don't know dude. I'm still somehow not convinced by the idea that joy can exist without sorrow. I'm still having a hard time comprehending that there can be a permanent state of bliss. Endless joy is just so suffocating in nature. What if the thing which makes me happy is the unpredictability of life, the sense of adventure that comes with not knowing what happens tomorrow? The monotony of permanent bliss will just bore me to a point where it'll start seeming suffocating.

BUDDHA

(gets up and walks towards
the railing)

But hasn't the rush of constantly seeking pleasure from new things exhausted you to a point where it seems futile. If you'll be eating Nutella everyday then there'd a point when you won't derive joy out of it anymore. And then perhaps you'll seek Chinese food? You'll put in effort and try to change your circumstances to fit what you want. Then Italian, then continental and it never ends. You say there's monotony in being an ascetic but isn't there monotony in being a consumer too. Being stuck in the loop of having a pair of shoes, seeking newer more fashionable shoes, getting them and then repeating the entire process all over again. Do you not find it draining to constantly want newer articles of technology, clothing, fragrances? Being so close to having everything you want and yet never really being there. Running behind something you can't catch up to

(Maya's phone starts ringing. Her attention diverts. Looks for the phone to cut the call and then looks back to where

Buddha was standing only to see no one there. She looks around but finds no one)

MAYA

(Goes back to her laptop.
Looks at her cart and closes
the tab. Opens a word
document and types the
heading)

'CONSUMERISM FROM THE LENS OF BUDDHISM' -
Maya

FADE OUT:

CREDIT ROLL