

# ALL OF ME

## Neng Sheng – Hua Zang Workshop, Milwaukee, U.S.A.

I saw this movie ‘All of Me’ many years ago. It was a comedy starring Steve Martin and Lily Tomlin. The story line was quite simple – a wealthy but cranky lady (played by Tomlin) died, was cremated and her ashes were kept in an urn. Somehow, due to a freak accident, her urn fell into the street one day, and the ashes sprinkled all over an innocent bystander (played by Steve Martin). Her spirit entered his body. Needless to say, that’s when the story began. Trying to act normal and to carry on with his daily routine, Martin’s actions were often hindered by decisions from Tomlin, who was residing in his body and influencing his mind. Even though it was a comedy, I was intrigued by both the story line, and the music that accompanied it.

It may sound kind of strange but for many years I felt like there had been another person residing in me, sharing my body, my mind and my soul. This ‘other’ person kept making decisions that I regretted, or doing things that I knew weren’t appropriate. Yet, I was the one who had to face all the consequences; I just couldn’t put the blame on the ‘other’ me all the time. In the song ‘All of Me’, the singer is devastated, when his true love decides to leave him and never, ever return. So his plea is to have her take his body parts with her too, as he has no use for them anymore:

“All of me, why not take all of me.  
I’m no good without you.  
Take my lips, I want to lose them.  
Take my arms, I’ll never use them.  
Your goodbye left me with eyes that cry.  
How can I go on dear without you?  
You took the part that once was my heart.  
So why not take all of me”



‘You took the part that once was my heart’. “Ouch!” that must have been painful! Can you imagine having your heart ripped out from your body? Sometime after practicing Buddhism and following Master Haiyun HeShang’s teaching, I began to think that the heart, without the feelings associated with it, is just another body part, albeit an important one responsible for keeping the body alive. And what is a living body that has no moral values, no sense of righteousness, and no compassion for others? Well, that person might as well be a walking corpse! Our body consists of parts that help us function on a daily basis, but what keeps us going is our mind and consciousness – our beliefs and our faith. Now I begin to understand and admire the true heroes of the past – those who truly believed

in what they thought was right, be it their religions, philosophies, patriotism, willingness to give themselves to follow their beliefs or to save others. Yes, you can gouge out my eyes, cut out my tongue and rip out my heart. Yes, take my body parts, take ‘All of Me’, but I will carry on and live forever!

I once read a story that Buddha, in his previous life as a king, met an eagle chasing a dove; the dove asked the king to save it from being eaten by the eagle. The king agreed to give flesh from his own body, equal in weight to that of the dove, as food for the eagle. The flesh was then put on a scale, piece by piece, to balance the weight of the bird. All the flesh that was cut off somehow could not equal the weight of the dove. Finally, the king put his whole body onto the scale as remuneration to save the dove. And right at the moment when he did it, the sky opened up and there was music everywhere. The king had set his spirit free by willing to give all of himself to save others.

So, take ‘All of Me’, I don’t need it anymore. But, who is this ‘me’, I wonder? We are all ‘Xiu Pi Nang’ (stinking bag of skin) in a way. So why do we spend so much time worrying how we look, what we wear, and what we own so as to impress others? Compared to the existence of the universe, we are nothing but a tiny, tiny speck. Why do I worry myself sick everyday about paying bills, making ends meet, saving money for retirement, and making sure that my kids and grandkids have money to attend college? Then I wonder, what did human race do for all these years, when survival was not having a big house or driving a fancy car, but just being able to live one day and move on to the next? The United States, one of the mightiest nations on earth, is only a couple hundreds years old. And China, with five thousand years of known civilization in the history of mankind, didn’t even exist when the dinosaurs were ruling the world. And looking at the galaxy that is millions and billions of light years away from earth, what we have on this tiny speck called earth is totally insignificant.

Before I learned Buddhism, I was always preoccupied and worried about what others would think of ‘Me’, and I reacted accordingly. I would make decisions and then later wonder if I had done the right thing. I was troubled because I was not living my life the way I wanted. I was lost because I did not know what path to choose or follow. After following HeShang’s teachings, my perception has gradually changed.

Yes, the other voice inside me keeps popping up every once in a while. But, after I have given ‘All of Me’ to the Noble Path, all decisions have been easy. I just need to live a simple life that can benefit others.