



It's Now or Never!

Neng Sheng – Milwaukee, U.S.A.

For years, my buddies & I have been playing this popular song, “It’s Now or Never”, by Elvis every chance we get. It originated from an old Italian folk song “O Sole Mio!” with a nice, flowing melody. I still get goose bumps every time I hear the three tenors sing it. Somewhere along the way, a musician converted it to a love song with a Cha Cha/Rumba rhythm, and the effect is totally awesome! The meaning of the title has been totally altered – from singing ‘The Sun of Mine’, a folk song glorifying the beauty of nature, to become a love song – how a young singer is attracted by a true beauty, and all he wants is to spend intimate time with her now, before tomorrow comes, before it is too late. Even by today’s standards, the lyrics may still raise a few eyebrows. Yet, it is a beautiful love song, and we all sing it with a smile!

Ever since I have been learning about Buddhism and have taken refuge with HeShang, Venerable Haiyun Jimeng, my thinking process has been gradually changing. I stop looking at everything and judging it by what it appears to be. Rather, I ask myself, why is that? What does it really mean? And what can it really be, in the sense that we can comprehend its true essence and are not distracted by its appearance alone?

“It’s Now or Never” is a simple love song: “It’s now or never, come hold me tight, kiss me my darling, be mine tonight. Tomorrow will be too late. It’s now or never. My love won’t wait.” It is a plea from a lover to his beloved. Now, give it to me now, or it will be too late. Isn’t that ironic? Buddha’s teachings in many circumstances reiterate that the past is gone, the future has not arrived and we should concentrate and focus on NOW, the present moment! Drop your butcher knife, you can be a Buddha in this instance! Whatever happened in the past, there is nothing you can do to undo it; be they be fond memories, or nightmares that can haunt you forever. And the future, who knows what it will bring. So let us not be bothered by the past and stop to worry about tomorrow. Instead, let us begin to embrace NOW, this precious moment of existence and breathe the air of ‘the Precious Present’. When we develop this different perspective on Past, Present and Future, our thinking process and our choices will all change. A right attitude or comprehension of Past, Present and Future is therefore very important.

I remember the famous dance Anthony Quinn performed in ‘Zorba the Greek’, and the music behind it. Remember what Zorba said?

“ A fresh road, and fresh plans! ” he cried.

“ I’ve stopped thinking all the time of what’s going to happen tomorrow.
What’s happening today, this minute, that’s what I care about.
I say: ‘What are you doing at this moment, Zorba?’ ‘I’m sleeping.’ ‘Well, sleep well.’
‘What are you doing at this moment, Zorba?’ ‘I’m working.’ ‘Well, work well.’
‘What are you doing at this moment, Zorba?’ ‘I’m kissing a woman.’
‘Well, kiss her well, Zorba! And forget all the rest while you’re doing it; there’s
nothing else on earth, only you and her! Get on with it!’ ”

We all have those moments when we are reminiscing about our past. “Oh, how I should have married Betty Lou instead of Mary Jane”. Or, “I should have started my own business instead of wasting my life with the same company, doing the same thing over and over again, day after day for the past thirty years”. Regardless of what happened, what was, it is the mystery of life that we all have to live with. We cannot change the past but we can influence the course of actions of tomorrow by being in control of the present. Where we are NOW at this moment is decided by our past actions and where we will be “Then” is determined by the present actions we are taking. So do not be obsessed with what should or could have happened, but rather have a clear understanding and appreciation of the Present and make the most out of it.

I love the ocean. I can sit on the beach for hours listening to the sound of the waves and the wind blending in with the song of the sea gulls. I can visualize that experience with my eyes closed. A wave is forming way out in the ocean, and rushing to shore. It breaks right before it hits the shoreline. While washing away the mark it left earlier, it leaves new traces while retreating back to the ocean. And then, it comes back roaring with all its might, just to leave new marks and configurations on the sand. In the same instant, the past, the present, and the future are all in one note, waiting for us to comprehend it. Looking at the universe, doesn’t it represent the ocean, but on a much larger scale? The universe has been around for billions and billions of years, and our mother earth is just a speck amongst all other planets. Even when time stands still, just how do we measure time? While we complain the red light stays too long when we are in a hurry, just what is ‘too long’ compared to the time of the universe? What is time: one of the dimensions or an illusion of our brain? Can we travel through time, backward or forward, when our energy level magnifies tremendously?

Without the past, we cannot measure the success we have accomplished for the present. And without the present, who knows what tomorrow will bring? The timeless ocean reminds us of the time that we are living in. The wave washes to the shore, carrying all the glorious past, and a hint of promise for the future. When the tide lands, and before it retreats back to the ocean, that’s the precious moment of NOW, and that’s what we should look at. That perfect picture of peace, tranquility, and the image of what the future should look like, or bring. But for now, what can we do, or should we do?

My dear friends, enjoy the ‘Precious Now’, the moment before the next wave comes, and then is gone again in a split second. Live today as if there is no tomorrow. Love someone as if there is no tomorrow. Share and give what you have as if there is going be no tomorrow. And what you will have in return is going to last forever. If you can get hold of the Present, you may own Eternity. It’s Now or Never. Ain’t it the truth??

