

Taking the bus to Paris

“When in Rome, do as the Romans do” is a well known proverb. It means that when visiting a foreign land, we should follow the customs of those who live in it. About Paris, however, I often use another saying in my Tales:

“When in Paris, you can’t take the bus to Paris”.

This metaphor is meant to explain to seekers for happiness, liberation or enlightenment, that the seeking is preventing them from getting free. They are already there, there is nothing to achieve but the notion that there is nothing to achieve.

I don’t know where I heard the metaphor first, but it is a great way of explaining what happens in the minds of those who seek for liberation. I thought I might expand a bit on this simile and see how far I can take it before it breaks down.

The story of the mind, being not in Paris

So, here is the story. You are in the world somewhere. It is a strange world and a strange place. You are not completely miserable, you are sort of feeling okay with things, but there is a nagging feeling that something is wrong, not complete, that you are missing “it”. This can’t be all there is, there must be more, you think. Then you come across stories about a place called Paris. No one knows exactly where Paris is, and what it looks like, but it sounds great. And from all you hear, Paris is very different from where you are right now, and it is the place to be. In Paris, as the stories go, you will find “it”. Your problem(s) will be solved for ever and for good. Some say that Paris is only for after-life, but no one knows for sure. The fact that no one you know has ever returned from Paris and actually had the *Parisian* experience, doesn’t deter you. On the contrary, it only feeds your craving for it. You might be the first one! So, you start looking for it. Where is Paris hiding? There are some vague routes, and they point in different directions. But then you suddenly are so lucky to find a bus. On the sign in front it says: Paris. The driver says he will bring you to Paris. So you think this is indeed the bus to Paris and you hop on. The ride takes forever.

Where are we now?

So now you are convinced you are not in Paris, but on the bus to Paris. That makes you feel a bit better already. Something is in store for you and you are almost there! If you only stay on the bus long enough, keep paying for it, looking outside for the scenery to change into what you imagine to be more “*Parisian*”, you will get to it in the end.

The scenery however doesn’t change. It looks the same as you are used to. This doesn’t disappoint you at first, you simply conclude that this is not yet Paris. For, if it were Paris, you would recognize it, from the stories, wouldn’t you? The stories that said it would be something completely different from your normal experience.

Every now and then the bus comes at little towns with strange names, like “This is it”, or “Right here now”, and a passenger who seems to have suddenly changed his mind, pushes the button for the bus to halt, and – looking strangely happy – gets off the bus. You don’t understand him and you are

convinced he must be missing the point. Clearly this is not Paris, this place is not called Paris and it looks exactly the same as where you came from. He must be mistaken. Or does he know something that you don't get? It is a bit worrying, but you stay on the bus, still believing to be on the right track.

Why are we not in Paris?

After a while though, sitting in the bus and quietly meditating, looking at the scenery flashing by, your mind becomes more calm and you start to doubt the story about Paris altogether. If there were a Paris, wouldn't you have already arrived? How long can a bus trip take? Perhaps your dissatisfaction with the scenery that you were used to, is only coming from rejection of what is. You thought that the world consisted of objects, people, things, all outside you and separate. You had a good enough go at many of those things, but they didn't fulfill you because they always stayed outside you, you never felt completely one with them and you felt as if you didn't belong, and it didn't belong to you either. The feeling was like "been there, done that, what's next?" So you went seeking for a better experience, instead of questioning the story in your mind. The only reason that you were not in Paris was because your mind told you so and you believed that you and your mind are always on the same page. Convinced that you were not in Paris, but somewhere else, and now only on the bus to Paris, you kept believing that you were not in Paris. Because, otherwise how could you be on the bus to it? Being in Paris, there wouldn't even *be* a bus to Paris, right? So now you are for ever on the bus to Paris, seeing still the same scenery outside and hoping for improvement. But there is no real improvement so far at all. You just changed the illusion of not being in Paris for another one that you are in the bus to Paris. You even start to miss your own place. Did you always reject it, or were there times in your youth that you were content there? Perhaps your mind was wrong, this is an illusion, and there is no Paris, perhaps you are even dreaming the bus as well? In that case, you needn't stay in the bus, you need to wake up! This feeling already makes your eyes open wider and wider.

We are always in Paris for Paris is all there is

Had you questioned your mind and not believed the story that it made up - which is in fact an illusion - that Paris is different from and better than where you already are, you would not have taken a bus to it and just stayed home, because that would be a great place to wake up as well, and much easier. Dealing with what is really.

And actually, it suddenly becomes clear to you that perhaps you were in Paris all the time! Only the very thought that "this is not Paris" stood between you and being in Paris. Because, as it turns out, Paris is all there is, it is the only place! What a relief! (I told you in the beginning, this is a strange world didn't I?).

So, there is no place to go to. And you are already there. Finally realizing this, you ask yourself: what the hell I am doing in this bus? So you push the button and at the first stop, smiling, you get out. As soon as you get out of the bus you see it is going nowhere, it is only going around in ever decreasing circles, and if you take a good look, you even see it disappear into its own exhaust pipe. It has vanished, just like your seeking mindset. Now you start looking around, for the first time in your adult life.

Nothing wrong with Paris, it was only in your mind

It is very ordinary in Paris actually, perhaps not even *Parisian*, or is it? It is nothing like you thought it would be. But anyway it is all there is. And it is not bad at all. It even feels strangely familiar, as if you were born here and saw it before. And when you take a close look at it, with presence, with an all

embracing heart in stead of a separating mind, suddenly the place will light up and starts feeling better and better, even sort of good. At least it will feel complete, and good enough. It turns out that you can be alive in this place very well. Even if you are not rich, or powerful, or handsome, and even completely on your own, this place is nothing less than a miracle. You and the place and all that seemed to be in it, outside you, are in fact the one and only place to be. You were in that place all along. Now you are sure, and fully awake! There is nothing to gain. There was no trip to Paris, it was only the bus in your mind going round and round in circles, on its way to a place that didn't exist. It was a bad dream. You have arrived! In Paris? Even that is not important any more. Paris called by any other name would still be as complete.

Get off the damn bus and wake up!

So, whenever you have the feeling that something is wrong, that you need to go somewhere else to be happy, or that you in fact are on your way in the bus to that place (I am almost there), called Paris or by any other name , it is illusory: don't believe these thoughts. Push the button, and at the first stop get out of the bus and notice, that it was only circling around in your thoughts in the only place that there is. And be happy with it, for it is here and now only that you are Alive. And everything is Alive in you and *as* you. You just have to realize this and not believe any thoughts that try to tell you differently. It is that simple: just stop believing your thoughts. They are not really yours, they are of the mind only. And the mind is not at all who you are.

Or, in the words of William Blake¹:

*"This life's five Windows of the Soul
Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole
And leads you to Believe a Lie
When you see with, not thro', the Eye
That was born in a night to perish in a night
When the Soul slept in the beam of Light".*

Is this about me?

After reading this, you might think: "this was a nice little story, but what is it to me? I am not seeking." But you might be wrong about that. Basically, unknowingly perhaps, almost everyone in this weird species that calls itself *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* (which is Latin for The Ever Thinking Man) is seeking, except for a very few who never left Paris or found out it is right here and now. We are seeking for all the wrong things in the wrong places. In Religion, we are seeking for *a* God. In (Western) Philosophy, we are seeking for who we *think* we are. In Science, we are seeking for a Theory of Everything to *understand* nature. In politics and Sociology, we are seeking for the perfect society that makes everybody *slightly* happy. In money, we are seeking for *material* riches. In our relations, we are seeking for *romantic* love and belonging. In the Arts, we are seeking for the ultimate *expression* of being. In Spirituality, we are seeking for *our* liberation or enlightenment. And because this all doesn't work out,

¹ William Blake (1757-1827), from: *The Everlasting Gospel*, lines 172-177, Nicholson & Lee eds., The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse, 1917.

we are seeking *health* in medication and *solace* in drugs, *communication* in words and our *self* in thoughts, *victory* in discussions and wars - and our *ego* is seeking for *itself* in everything.

But none of this will make us find anything of true value. The common experience is, we are seeking with the *mind* for something outside us. While we should be making a 180 degree turn, and using our *intuition* to *discover* who we truly already are inside, and this is not a seeking or even a finding. At the end of seeking, there is no finding. There is no path and nowhere to go to. It is not finding that will save or liberate us, but the end of seeking.

Because all the time, like St. Francis of Assisi already said, "what you are seeking for is where you are seeking from". Or in other words of Jesus, "the Kingdom of Heaven is within you". Or, in the words of this Tale: "Stop seeking, you are already in Paris".

On a personal note: I have been in Paris a couple of times in different periods of my life. Overall, it didn't make a great impression on me. I thought it was a crowded and messy place, like many large cities in the world are. *Montmartre* however is my favorite part of Paris, where the great artists like Modigliani, Renoir, Monet and Picasso historically lived, and still artists of today do their magic on the street. I had a caricature made of my face, which sadly got lost in one of my many moves.

Debbie was in Paris once too, when she was a young girl and looking ever so beautiful as she is today still. I wasn't around at that time, but boy, would I love to have been! Well, I include a picture of her in Paris, and in my heart I see myself with her. Let's imagine I am the one who took it maybe. Why not?



Debbie in Paris – ca. 1981

“Paris” – the miraculous place where we already are and always were!

The place to Be! (Or was it London?)

J.Paul Jordaan

Grathem, 6 April 2022

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Post scriptum 18 April 2022

After looking at the 1981-picture of Debbie more closely, we deciphered the name of the train station where Debbie was standing. It turns out not to be a train station, but a metro station.

Glacière metro station is situated along the metro line no. 6 in the 13th arrondissement of Paris. It is not underground, as you can see, but over, on a bridge on the *Boulevard Auguste-Blanqui*.

Originally it dates from 1906. Along the banks of the river *Bièvre*, a side stream of the *Seine*, in the 18th century there were ponds that froze over in winter. The ice from the ponds was kept in cool bunkers to be used for cooling in summer. The ponds were also popular for ice skating. In 1860 the *Rue de la Glacière* was created, which later gave its name to the metro station in question.

Originally, *Glacière* was a station along line 2 *Sud*, but with the expansion of the metro system², as of 1907 it was a part of line 5. Currently, and since 1942, is a station along line 6, that goes from *Charles de Gaulle – Etoile* to *Place d'Italie*, to end in *Nation*.

We found a picture of the current situation, and we could exactly locate the position that Debbie was standing at in 1981.



² In describing this metro station, I was duly inspired by Jago Hazzard's [YouTube](#) channel, which is about the metro line in London

At the left side, where originally there was a little wooden bench where Debbie stood in 1981, now there is a series of 4 modern red coloured seats. The stairs are still in the same place, and of course the advertising for *Cuir Centre* (leather center) is changed for something actual called *Rock en Seine*, a rock music festival that yearly takes place since 2003, Southwest of Paris. The name shield of the station, originally in metal with enamel, is now modernized as well for something that probably can't rust (it will deteriorate from other causes no doubt).

From the outside, the metro station *Glacière* looks like this:



The construction resembles the one used in the famous *Eiffel* tower. In 2018, reconstruction of the staircases of the station won a Tekla Global BIM award for small projects. Especially difficult was to make the new structure fit exactly to the old to the millimeter, even although the old had tolerances that were ten times larger. In the jury report we can read:

"The elegance of design for the small station is impressive. The bolt pattern of the steel and the relationship from the new to the old is very well delineated and worked well"³.

³ Mr Elbert O. Speidel, jury member and A.I.A. Professor at *CalPoly*.