

Transforming Difficulties into the Path of Joy: *Buddhist Wisdom for the New Year*

In *A Dharma Gong to Wake Us from Ignorance*, I wrote:

*Don't be like a mother, searching in the West,
for a child she has lost in the East!
Having turned the mind inwards,
don't seek happiness outside!*

So now, what can we do about it? It is only the first step to stop seeking outside for happiness. The next step is to identify the methods to unveil inner happiness. Here, I would like to offer a suggestion that came to me while reflecting on this piece. This is a practical and simple contemplation that anyone can do with a little bit of discipline and consistency.

To contemplate happiness in the course of a single day, it is helpful to think of it in the very moment you find yourself. For instance, to begin your day, you can relish your first meal. If you are having it with your family, you can take a few moments and truly appreciate that time for however long your breakfast is. In essence, you have created happiness for that duration. Then after breakfast as you begin to meet people, you can direct your attention toward appreciating the positive traits in the individuals with whom you interact. Even when you find troubling aspects in someone, if you redirect your mind to your own faults before finding one in the other, and genuinely appreciate the person before you, then in that moment, you experience happiness.

Psychologists say now that perhaps 95% of what we see in another person is based on our own mental projections imputed onto them. Actually, the great Buddhist saint and philosopher Nagarjuna was saying just about the same thing in the second century!

As your day progresses, pause to appreciate your lunch, whether at home or at a restaurant. Even if lunch is unsavory at a restaurant, at that moment if you are able to think of all the homeless, migrants or refugees, and countless others literally starving to death, it will, in that instant, help transform your mental disposition, and bring gratitude and happiness. Arguing or complaining over it, on the other hand, will only cause you distress.

Likewise, after lunch, if you engage mindfully with your body, speech and mind during dinner, or any activity for the rest of the day, then you are able to establish happiness within a 24-hour period: a day with inner happiness. If you go with the whims of the untamed mind, you will never be able to find contentment, you will never find happiness. There is always cause for self-made discontentment that must be watched and constantly corrected.

Conversely, if you repeat the above meditations from one day to the next, you will become the cause of your own happiness. Practice this repeated shifting of perspective away from noticing flaws or distraction, and towards appreciation, gratitude, and the moment-by-moment beauty of life. Don't take my word for it. Try it and see what happens!

Dealing with Difficulty

When we meet with frustration and difficulties, if we are overly sensitive and very resentful of it, our frustration and pain will only become stronger until it feels like there is a mountain oppressing our body and mind. Although we have physical and mental hardship, if we are less impatient and don't develop resentment; the discomfort, while it lasts, can become lighter, like a dandelion seed puff, and easier to bear.

Again, when we meet with difficulty we should realize that it is our karma and not let it bring us down; rather, we should seek a means to dispel it. If there is nothing at all that we can do about it, ruminating and worrying about it, that will only add another layer of suffering to the frustration we already feel. A better alternative is to look inward, and, if we can transform our mind, we can definitely dispel frustrations.

As said in Guide to the Bodhisattva Conduct,

*Troublesome beings are present throughout space;
there is no way I could overcome them all!
If I can just overcome my mind of anger
it will be just like overcoming all enemies.*

*Though I try to cover the whole earth in leather,
where could I get the leather to do it?
But leather on the soles of my feet
works the same as covering the whole earth.*

When we meet with difficulty we shouldn't just try to deal with it on an outer level; we should learn methods to inwardly transform our mind. Difficulties don't arise without causes and conditions; we should check what those causes and conditions are. Many of our difficulties we may find are produced by mistaken ways of thinking.

When we meet with difficulties, everything is relative, and we should think about it in perspective. If we compare our difficulties with someone who seems to be free from these challenges, it will make our suffering appear greater; whereas, if we compare it to someone destitute who is tormented by suffering, our own difficulties may seem quite small. When we experience hardship, we should always think of the less fortunate and especially those who are currently undergoing suffering.

If we always think about Dharma, impermanence, selflessness, interdependence, and so on, it will make a big difference when we meet with hardship; we will be less disturbed by it. If we can henceforth plant instincts in our mind for the Dharma, even if we don't believe in reincarnation, it can make a big difference in how we deal with the many difficult things we encounter during the course of our lives.

From *A Dharma Gong to Wake Us from Ignorance* by Khenpo Karten Rinpoche:

ལྷན་མོ་བྱི་ལ་མ་བཟུ། །ནང་ལ་ལྷན་མོ་བསྐྱོས་དང་།

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Don't look for shows outside;
watch the show inside!
If you are lucky you'll discover
a show like never seen before!

མཚུབ་མོ་བྱི་ལ་བཅུགས་ནས། །གཞན་གྱི་སྐྱོན་འཚང་མ་ལྔོག།
མཚུབ་མོ་ནང་དུ་བཅུགས་ནས། །རང་ལ་ཁྱེད་གཏོང་རོགས།

Don't dig for other's faults!
Don't point your finger outward!
Pointing your finger inward,
correct your own mistakes, please!