

## Staying Centred in a Chaotic World

This year, our world never seems to get any less chaotic or more peaceful does it? As we face one scary crisis after another without even a day or two between them, many of us may be becoming almost permanently stressed or anxious. As I write this message, we are being told that two exceptionally hot days in July are going to be a 'threat to life!' and that 'many of us' are going to die because of this exceptional heat wave. Really? I think that the vast majority of us will easily survive a temperature in the high 90s for just two days, although we may well have to take it very easy during the day and surrender to tossing and turning during a bit during the night. Of course, if you have just read those last few sentences sometime in August, you definitely did survive the 'heatwave apocalypse'. Congratulations!

How should we respond to all this constant fear-mongering and all the endless moaning and groaning about the state of our modern world? First and foremost, it is so important to spend just a little time each day pausing to count our myriad blessings. For example, if we are worried about being too hot at any point this summer, we can remind ourselves how fortunate we are to have a fridge that makes ice or a shop nearby that sells ice-cold drinks. If we find that we are anxiously ruminating about the cost of living crisis, we can just go and open a single cupboard to see how incredibly abundant we are compared to billions of other human beings in less affluent parts of the world.

Next, whenever we notice that we are beginning to get stressed, anxious or depressed, we can pause to examine whether it might be our thoughts about what is going on rather than external events *per se* that are stressing us out the most. For example, if we are delayed at an airport or a train station or held up in a traffic jam this summer, we do have choices. We can either rant and rave about the incompetent management of airports, railways or roads, or we can get really anxious about how long the delay might last, or – and this does take some serious mastery of our crazy mind – we can choose to relax. How can we possibly do that in a really stressful situation? Well first of all, we can choose to think relaxing thoughts. For example, if we face a delay in a journey of some kind, we can tell ourselves something like: 'OK, this delay is not ideal, but there really is not much I can do about it. So I will choose to live in the moment and find a way to enjoy it or at the very least accept it.'

I have been practising this in my own life and it does seem to help. Gloria and I were delayed by over an hour the other day on a train journey back to Manchester from Edinburgh and we ended up having a lovely, warm conversation with several of our fellow travellers. Looking back on that event, I can see that I would not have enjoyed that conversation if I had not decided to simply surrender to the delay, rather than fighting against it with angry or fearful thoughts.

According to key Buddhist teachings, two of the main reasons why we constantly suffer in life are our tendency to crave what we want but do not have and our tendency to try to resist or push away what we have but do not want. For example, if it is raining and we tell ourselves we cannot be happy until the sun comes out, what is really causing us to suffer: the rain or our craving for sunshine? Or we have to spend some time with someone who irritates us. Is it really all down to them that we are suffering, or is it partly down to us because we are refusing to let go of our aversion to the situation?

Perhaps this month, you could just notice this normal human tendency to indulge in craving and/or aversion and keep a little record of how much time you spend wishing reality were

different to how it is moment to moment. Simply seeing what is going on in our own mind is often the only incentive we need to change our mind – in this instance by gently letting go of our insistence that reality has to change for us to be content or at peace.

Gloria and I went to Edinburgh last week to attend an event in which the world famous Buddhist teacher Mingyur Rimpoche gave several talks. He was awesome (and I never use that word lightly). I have since watched some of his You Tube videos and in one of them, he talks about how we can simply hold everything that we perceive all around us in pure, unlimited awareness. Instead of trying to hold on tightly to pleasurable experiences and push away less pleasant experiences, we can practise calmly accepting everything that is happening to us moment by moment. As we do this we can also remind ourselves that all events and circumstances in this world are just like fleeting clouds floating across an unchanging, vast blue sky.

Neither pain nor pleasure lasts for long in this ever-changing world. But if we look deeply into our own mind, we will discover that our awareness of ourselves and this world is the one unchanging feature of our life. Moreover, this pure awareness has no limits. This unchanging awareness is our true-self that exists above or beyond all the limiting temporary aspects of our personality self and our thinking mind. So the more we can expand our consciousness and tune into the calm, compassionate spacious awareness that is our true, unchanging identity, the more we can rise above all the endless challenges of being a fearful personality-self trapped in an extremely vulnerable physical body in a totally chaotic world.

Let me conclude this short message on staying centred in the midst of endless conflict and chaos by directly quoting the great Buddhist teacher Mingyur Rimpoche:

*Be with everything as it is. Welcome everything. Let everything come and go within completely free awareness – an awareness that has no limitations and no edge.*

Peggy Foster  
August 2022