

9.

[The Eight Pillars of Joy]

4. Acceptance: The Only Place
Where Change Can Begin

5. Forgiveness: Freeing Ourselves from the Past

6. Gratitude: I Am Fortunate to Be Alive

7. Compassion: Something We Want to Become

p.223

“Why be unhappy about something if it can be remedied? And what is the use of being unhappy if it cannot be remedied?”

Acceptance, it must be pointed out, is the opposite of resignation and defeat,

p.224

We cannot succeed by denying what exists. The acceptance of reality is the only place from which change can begin.

Julian of Norwich wrote Revelations of Divine Love in 1373 after recovering from life-threatening illness

p.225

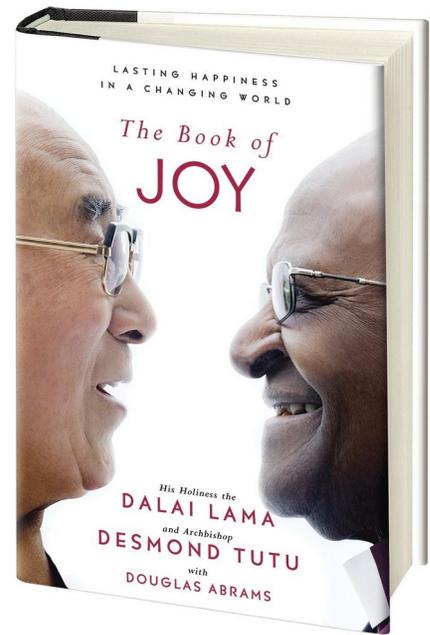
[Acceptance] allows us to engage with life on its own terms rather than rail against the fact that life is not as we would wish [...] stress and anxiety come from our expectations of how life should be.

So many of the causes of suffering come from our reacting to the people, places, things, and circumstances in our lives, rather than accepting them. When we react, we stay locked in judgment and criticism, anxiety and despair, even denial and addiction. It is impossible to experience joy when we are stuck this way. Acceptance is the sword that cuts through all of this resistance, allowing us to relax, to see clearly, and to respond appropriately.

Much of the Buddhist practice is directed toward the ability to see life accurately, beyond all the expectations, projections, and distortions we typically bring to it. Meditative practice allows us to quiet the distracting thoughts and feelings so that we can perceive reality, and respond to it more skillfully. The ability to be present in each moment is nothing more and nothing less than the ability to accept the vulnerability, discomfort, and anxiety of everyday life.

p.226

The kind of acceptance that the Dalai Lama and the Archbishop were advocating is not passive. It is powerful. It does not deny the importance of taking life seriously and working hard to change what needs changing, to redeem what needs redemption. “You must not hate those who do harmful things”



pp.226-227

One of the key paradoxes of Buddhism is that we need goals to be inspired, to grow, and to develop, even to become enlightened, but at the same time we must not get overly fixated or attached to these aspirations. If the goal is noble, your commitment to the goal should not be contingent on your ability to attain it, and in pursuit of our goal, we must release our rigid assumptions about how we must achieve it. Peace and equanimity come from letting go of our attachment to the goal and the method. That is the essence of acceptance.

our responsibility is to pursue the goal with all the dedication we can muster, do the best we can but not become fixated on a preconceived notion of a result. Sometimes, actually quite often, our efforts lead to an unexpected outcome that might even be better than what we originally had in mind.

p.228

Acceptance was the final pillar of the mind, and it led us to the first pillar of the heart: forgiveness. When we accept the present, we can forgive and release the desire for a different past.

p.231

you and you and you have the potential to be instruments of incredible compassion and forgiveness. We cannot say of anyone at all that they are totally unable to forgive. I think that all of us have the latent potential, as His Holiness is pointing out, to be sorry for these others who are disfiguring their humanity in this way. Indeed, no one is incapable of forgiving and no one is unforgivable.

p.233

Generally, when we speak of cultivating compassion for someone, we are cultivating compassion for someone who is actually undergoing acute suffering and pain. [...] In our view also those people who are committing atrocities, including murder, are creating karma that brings very serious negative consequences. So there are many reasons to feel a sense of real concern for their well-being. When you have a sense of concern for their well-being, then there is no place for anger or hatred to grow.

Forgiveness does not mean you forget what someone has done. [...] Forgiveness does not mean that you do not seek justice or that the perpetrator is not punished.

p.234

Sometimes people misunderstand and think forgiveness means you accept or approve of wrongdoing. No, this is not the case. [...] This is where the power of forgiveness lies – not losing sight of the humanity of the person while responding to the wrong with clarity and firmness.

Without forgiveness, we remain tethered to the person who harmed us. We are bound to the chains of bitterness, tied together, trapped.

p.236

peace-making activities are extremely common in the animal kingdom. [...] Of the species that have been studied, only domestic cats have failed to show behaviour that reconciles relationships after conflict.

p.237

As social animals, it is very stressful for us, and for the whole group, when there is rupture in the relationships that bind us together.

p.241

Every day, think as you wake up, "I am fortunate to be alive. I have a precious human life. I am not going to waste it."

p.242

Gratitude is the recognition of all that holds us in the web of life and all that has made it possible to have the life that we have and the moment that we are experiencing. Thanksgiving is a natural response to life and may be the only way to savour it. Both Christian and Buddhist traditions, perhaps all spiritual traditions, recognize the importance of gratefulness. It allows us to shift our perspective...toward all we have been given and all that we have. It moves us away from the narrow-minded focus on fault and lack and to the wider perspective of benefit and abundance.

It is not happiness that makes us grateful. It is gratefulness that makes us happy. Every moment is a gift. There is no certainty that you will have another moment, with all the opportunity that it contains.

p.243

Gratitude means embracing reality. It means moving from counting your burdens to counting your blessings... both as an antidote to envy and a recipe for appreciating our own lives.

p.245

Whatever life gives you... you can respond with joy. Joy is the happiness that does not depend on what happens. It is the grateful response to the opportunity that life offers you

p.246

When you are grateful, you act out of a sense of enough and not out of a sense of scarcity, and you are willing to share. If you are grateful, you are enjoying the differences between people and respectful of all people. A grateful world is a world of joyful people.

p.247

"It's taught that the best way to create good karma with the least amount of effort is to rejoice in your good deeds and those of others." Rejoicing predisposes us to repeat those good deeds in the future.

Scientists have long known that our brains have evolved with a negative bias. It was no doubt advantageous for our survival to focus on what was wrong or dangerous. Gratitude cuts across this default mode of the mind. It allows us to see what is good and right and not just what is bad and wrong.

Perhaps because of this bias, people are often skeptical of gratitude and wonder if it is a naive point of view or will lead to complacency or even injustice.

p.251

On this planet, over the last three thousand years, different religious traditions developed. All these traditions carry the same message: the message of love. So the purpose of these different traditions is to promote and strengthen the value of love, compassion.

p.252

Compassion is a sense of concern that arises when we are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to see that suffering relieved. [...] Compassion is what connects the feeling of empathy to acts of kindness, generosity, and other expressions of altruistic tendencies.

pp.257-258

The modern world is suspicious of compassion because we have accepted the belief that nature is "red in tooth and claw" and that we are fundamentally competing against everyone and everything. According to this perspective, in our lives of getting and spending, compassion is at best a luxury, or at worst a self-defeating folly of the weak. Yet evolutionary science has come to see cooperation, and its core emotions of empathy, compassion, and generosity, as fundamental to our species' survival. [...] "reciprocal altruism." I scratch your back today, and you scratch my back tomorrow.

p.259

We fear compassion because we're afraid of experiencing the suffering, the vulnerability, and the helplessness that can come with having an open heart. [...] many people are afraid that if they are compassionate they will be taken advantage of, that others will become dependent on them, and that they won't be able to handle others' distress. [...]

Many people are also afraid of receiving compassion from others because they are afraid that others will want something in return or that they will at least feel indebted.

p.260

sometimes people are not very compassionate with themselves. People don't rest when they are tired, and neglect their basic needs for sleep, food, and exercise as they drive themselves harder and harder.

p.261

even ten minutes of meditation on the well-being of others can help one to feel joyful for the whole day – even before coffee. When we close our heart, we cannot be joyful. When we have the courage to live with an open heart, we are able to feel our pain and the pain of others, but we are also able to experience more joy.

Questions for reflection:

1. Describe a time where you have felt acceptance (not resignation or defeat).
2. Consider a time when you were called to show forgiveness – did it come easily?
3. What does being grateful in an intentional way add to your daily experience?
4. Where has compassion entered into political policy, or perhaps lack of compassion (for reasons of others become dependent, for example)?

Session 10: pp.263-305 [final session]