

Dharma Talk at Buddha Center, Second Life
January 4, 2010
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We are just finishing up the holiday season, having celebrated Christmas last week and New Year's Day a few days ago. So many people look forward to the holiday season as an opportunity for celebrations, togetherness with family and friends, good food and drink, the exchanging of presents, and a time to experience the "Christmas Spirit" of happiness, good cheer and love, a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood with the whole human community as one global family, with "Peace on Earth, goodwill toward men (and women also, of course).

For all my life I have enjoyed the Christmas season and all of the activities and togetherness that it has afforded me through the years. I love getting together with family and friends, enjoying good food and drink and the exchanging of presents (though I admit that Christmas shopping, trying to find the right gift within my budget for the right person, and trying to make sure that no one was forgotten, is still stressful for me). But in the past few years, I have given thought to this idea of a "holiday season", and the way so many people use it as a rationale to experience and express good feelings about others and themselves, feelings that they could be enjoying even if they were not in the midst of the holiday season. Why do we need the "excuse" of a holiday season to give ourselves permission to feel and share this spirit of universal brother- and sisterhood? What is the mystique of the whole "special day or time" perspective?

It seems that we need to manufacture a reason to allow ourselves to relax and feel really good. Whether it's Christmas or New Year's, another holiday, our birthday, our graduation day, our wedding day (or divorce day, for some), the day we get a new car, or land a great new job, or win lots of money in the lottery...the list can go on and on. We spend most of our lives wishing and hoping for the day, or time, or event, when we can let go, relax and be happy. Otherwise, it's just "business as usual", which means either the normal stress levels of our daily activities or a kind of neutral "grey" mood that carries us through what we would consider as a "normal" day. Why do we hold ourselves in this state of anticipation? Why can't we be, as Dan Millman, the Peaceful Warrior, puts it, "unreasonably happy", happy without needing a reason?

Carl Jung, the famous Swiss psychiatrist and psychological theorist, had a plaque hanging on the wall of his office with the inscription "Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit", which can be translated literally as "Whether summoned or unsummoned, God Is Present". I have tweaked that translation a bit to read "Whether you are aware of it or not, God (Divine Consciousness, Source Energy, whatever label you want to use) is present, right here and right now. To me this means that we don't have to wait for a "special" season, or day, or time, to experience our union with all-that-is. All the joy, the love, the happiness, the miraculousness, the wonder, the splendor of the Divine, is with us here and now. The divine miracle is always present in front of us and all around and within us. "Within you, without you", as the old Beatles' song goes.

So you need to ask yourself, “Do I want to wait another year (or however long) to get my Christmas gifts?” Or would you prefer just to open up your “presence” right now?

(One of the participants comments on the recent loss of her father just after Christmas. She had spent the holidays with him just prior to his passing).

He is where he needs to be, wherever he is right now, but there is no separation between you, and he is no more or less with you than before he passed. The real connection is in the heart, which has nothing to do with being in a physical body or one’s physical presence. You are never far apart. Perhaps on an unconscious level you would like to believe that you both knew this would be the last time you would spend together and you both wanted to acknowledge one more time, in physical form, the love you both had for each other. Take with you the feeling and the knowledge that the connection always was there and always will be. Things arise out of emptiness, exist for a while in form and then dissolve, returning to emptiness. The Buddha says that all “things” are impermanent. That is the nature of “things”. But presence is eternal. The more and more present you become, the more you align yourself with eternity, with your eternal nature. Focus on the connection, the joy and the love that we are. It is not something that we “have”...it is who we are.

That is the kingdom of heaven. There is no need to search, because if you search anywhere, you will never find it because the search takes you away from here and now. The kingdom of heaven is not only “here”, it *is* who you are. Your father’s physical being has returned to the elements, returned to earth and water and sky to become part of new physical life. But his consciousness is still present here and now. That is the true gift that we receive and open whenever we become present

Have I mentioned to you the Tibetan “Shortcut to Enlightenment”? A dear friend of mine, a spiritual teacher in his own way, shared this with me several years ago, and I still love it. Decide to become present in each moment, as often as you can, using these three “easy” steps:

Hear all sounds as mantras
See all beings as Buddhas
See all phenomena as Nirvana

Being sad is an appropriate feeling under certain circumstances. People are anxious or uncomfortable a lot of the time with feelings of grief, sadness, mourning, as well as with other negative emotions. But that is what we should be feeling, it is the right and proper response when we lose someone who has recently passed but who has been in our hearts for a long time. Being present means accepting whatever is happening here in this moment, whether that’s a “good” feeling or a “bad” feeling,

There are still “feelings” once one is “enlightened”. You simply feel directly, purely, you feel all the things you feel, without judging feelings as good or bad, without guilt or

shame for what you're feeling. You accept them, not fight them, and you don't feel bad that you are feeling bad. And then you let go of them, you let them pass, just as Jesus did with the moneychangers in the temple. He saw what was going on and became frustrated that they were contaminating the place that was dedicated to divine presence with their materialistic and greedy activities. And he took action, driving them out and chastising them. But once it was over, it was over. He did not harbor resentment or ideas of further vengeance upon them because they were as much children of God as anyone else. Remember, Jesus allowed himself to be crucified without reacting with anger, resentment or thoughts of vengeance, on his part or that of his followers. He forgave his killers. He understood the proper experience and expression of emotion from an enlightened perspective.

Understand that you can have fear without anxiety and worry, sadness without depression and despair, have anger without hatred, resentment and vengeance, and love without possession and jealousy. Anger and fighting come from the ego-mind thoughts. The more that you are present, transcending thoughts, without resisting or indulging them, the less of a rollercoaster life becomes. Even when life is a rollercoaster, and there are some people that like that, that are still attached to drama. It is the resistance to letting go that creates the problems, but all problems dissolve in the light of presence

So, for your Christmas "gift" I won't wish you a Merry Christmas or a Happy New Year, but rather wish you a Happy Presence! :-)

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