

Letting Nothing Disturb Your Inner Peace and Joy

I began writing this message on Blue Monday, the day in the year that is supposed to be the unhappy day for those living in the UK. I am also writing it the day after flying home from a two week retreat in Nerja Spain. In Nerja, the sun shines really brightly day after day even in January/February, whereas Manchester in winter is usually very damp and very grey. So my thoughts have understandably turned to what we might do to lead happier day to day lives, even when the sun is not shining on us.

I have recently read a brilliant book by Anthony de Mello, *Rediscovering Life*, in which he clearly distinguishes between seeking for pleasure in our lives and cultivating lasting inner happiness or contentment. De Mello states that all of us have been programmed to think that happiness is the result of getting something that we think that we really, really want, like a holiday, a new car, another qualification or promotion, or a new partner. But then when we find that this type of high never lasts, we tend to become miserable or depressed and so we seek for another high – that again never lasts!

De Mello argues that if we are brave enough to give up our extremely strong attachment to thrill seeking, we will find a much deeper kind of contentment. This type of lasting contentment emerges naturally when we become less attached to everything always going our personality-self's way. As we do this, we become more open to remaining peaceful and centred moment to moment regardless of whether our life circumstances are currently optimal or not so optimal.

Anthony de Mello writes *'We want kicks; we don't want happiness. We want thrills. And wherever you've got a thrill, you've got an anxiety, because you might lose that thrill, or you may not get it. And then you've got depression follow that, you've got a hangover.'* But he goes on, *'When misery caused by attachment (to the thrill of getting what we think we want) is dropped, happiness is attained.'*

What does this deeper long-lasting happiness look or feel like? Well basically it's impossible to describe - just as you cannot really describe water to a fish. The fish just has to be aware that he is dwelling in water and therefore needs absolutely nothing else to be perfectly content at all times.

Maybe words like 'peace' 'serenity' or 'enjoying life moment to moment' give a little taste of the freedom of this deeper all-embracing type of happiness that can even be experienced in the midst of pain. Now that sounds like a real paradox 'being happy in the midst of pain' but some human beings have found true happiness even whilst experiencing a terminal illness. The playwright Dennis Potter for example said when he was dying he saw a plum tree in blossom out of his window and that it was *'the frothiest, blossomest blossom that could ever be'*, because *'the newness of everything is absolutely wondrous'*.

After reading Anthony de Mello, I think I finally got what Buddhists are on about when they talk about non-attachment being the cure for all human suffering. In the past, I had always assumed that being non-attached to all worldly pleasures was rather puritanical and meant giving up rather fun things like ice-cream or alcohol. But Anthony de Mello clearly explains that we can still enjoy everything that this world has to offer as long as we rise above the programming that insists that we cannot be happy unless we have a particular external thing like a particular flavour of ice-cream or a particular human being at our side.

By the way, I once threw a real hissy-fit when we were on retreat with Jason Chan in Phuket Thailand because we went to an ice-cream parlour for a weekend treat and every flavour of ice-cream I asked for was out of stock. I clearly remember almost shouting, 'It's an ice-cream parlour for goodness sake! How can they not have the three most popular flavours of ice-cream!! At the time, I truly believed that the lack of chocolate/vanilla/coffee ice-cream was making me miserable. But having read De Mello, I can now see that it was my belief that I could not be happy with an alternative flavour of ice-cream that pushed me over the edge.

The great thing about this new insight about the art of non-attachment (well, new for me that is) is that I do not have to push myself through some arduous self-improvement programme to be more content. I just have to watch my attachment programming making me miserable and then decide that I can rise above it. If I can do this, you can certainly do it too!

For example, if you notice yourself getting irritated in a shop or restaurant, or getting low in spirits during a dark, damp day, you could just pause and ask yourself, 'Is it the 'poor' service or the 'bad' weather that is making me miserable, or the thought I am having that I cannot be happy if the service in a restaurant is 'poor' or the weather is 'bad'? Just asking this simple question could be revolutionary!! Why? Because you will finally begin to really get that nothing on the outside of you has the power to make you lose your underlying happiness, unless you choose to let it get to you. Now you have some real power over your life – the power to be content whatever is going on in the world around you.

Now I am certainly not claiming that I have cracked this yet, but I am really enjoying the challenge! If you would like to join me, I am sure that together we will arrive at a point of lasting inner peace and contentment much quicker than we would do on our own. So I am asking you this month to join together in mind and spirit with the core intention of dwelling in inner joy and peace whether or not the external world is currently meeting the demands of our very demanding personality-selves.

Peggy Foster
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