

## To change your future, you have to change your mind!



Every December 31<sup>st</sup>, as one year ends and a new one begins, we cross our collective fingers and hope or pray that the coming year will be better than the one just passed

This New Year, I am sure that many of us will look back on 2017 and be appalled or depressed at all the political and military madness that went on – let alone our own personal mishaps and challenges. Well, I hate to put a damper on your New Year celebrations, but I have a sneaky suspicion that 2018 will be another year of bad news on the international scene, the national scene

and even in your own community or family. Those Buddhist lamas are not wrong when they insist that life on this planet is one of more or less constant suffering or dissatisfaction.

So, is there any way that you can make 2018 a truly happy and fulfilling New Year? Yes! But it has nothing to do with any New Year rituals or New Year resolutions that you may make. By the way, in Spain - where Gloria and I have spent the last 10 New Years on retreat- they swallow 12 grapes as the gong strikes midnight in order to have 12 lucky months ahead. I tried it once and then decided I would rather have 12 unlucky months than go through that again!

But let us get a bit more serious because I really do long for you to have a wonderful 2018.

The key to creating a better future for ourselves is to accept that the only way our future is going to be better than our past is if we make a really determined effort to change our own mind. What does that mean in practical terms? It means watching your thoughts very carefully/mindfully so that you notice every angry, fearful, judgemental or unforgiving thought you begin to have about anything or anyone at all in this world.

Of course, we all think hundreds if not thousands of negative thoughts about the world every single day, so becoming aware of each and every one of our negative thoughts is a mammoth task! In fact, when we first really begin to notice how much negativity we have in our own mind, we may feel more rather than less uncomfortable for a while. But it is definitely worth persevering through this stage of 'conscious incompetence'. If we actually see how much we upset ourselves almost constantly by believing all the crazily negative thoughts that just pour through our mind uninvited, we finally have a real chance to stop upsetting ourselves so much.

Let's look at two hypothetical examples. Suppose you have not warmed to Donald Trump, and then you see a news item about his latest tweet. A really angry thought about him comes to the forefront of your mind, maybe something along the lines of, 'That man is a dangerous lunatic' or something much less polite. Once you observe this thought, you can then pause and make a very important choice. You can silently ask yourself, 'Do I really want to go on upsetting myself and polluting my energy field with this angry thought, or do I want to cheer myself up by deliberately bringing a much more compassionate thought into my mind. Maybe you might think to yourself, 'Poor Donald Trump, he does not seem very mentally stable. I will send him some healing love and light.'

Or take a hypothetical example closer to home. You have had a really busy day, and then you make a real effort to cook a nice meal for your partner, and instead of thanking you, or offering to do the washing up, he/she just turns on the TV and ignores you. Of course, your instant reaction is to feel hurt or annoyed, as you think a judgemental thought such as 'How can they be so selfish?' But if you are really committed to having a wonderful, peaceful, loving 2018, as soon as you notice this upsetting thought rising up in your mind, you will pause and replace it with a much kinder thought. Maybe you will tell yourself for example, 'I know that my partner has had a really hard week at work. I am sure his/her thoughtlessness is just because of extreme tiredness. It's really no big deal.'

Now these examples of changing your mind may not seem particularly earth shattering. But the wonderful news is that if we take the time and effort to train our own brain to become more positive and less judgemental, we actually change the neural pathways in it so that eventually staying positive becomes second nature to us.

So there you have it. As 2017 turns into 2018, please do not expect the world you live in to suddenly change from being really challenging to being all peace and light. It is not going to happen, however much we all pray for world peace etc. But we can all make a real difference to our world, if we only commit to changing at least some of our angry judgemental thoughts each day into thoughts of love and compassion. Because all minds are joined, each time just one individual sends thoughts of love and compassion out into the world around them, we all benefit. So not only can you create a much happier year for yourself by changing some of your own fearful thoughts into loving thoughts, you can also make the whole world just that little bit happier! How cool is that??

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