

Life Can Be Wonderful!

This I know. There are two ways to look at everything that happens to us in our lives. We can either constantly complain about our personal problems, and all the problems in the world around us, or we can consistently seek for peace, love and inner joy, even in the midst of conflict, fear and pain.

As I write this message, the media is awash with horror stories about the impact of 'The Beast from the East' on the UK and how incredibly dangerous and disruptive a fairly widespread snowfall has been. It is quite tempting to read the news, or even look out of the window, and begin to feel worried or depressed about the 'bad' weather. But I now know that if I let my mind worry about anything, I am basically adding to all the fearful energy in the world. So I now make an effort - day in and day out - to find joy and beauty in life, even when it seems pretty challenging.

The other day for example, I was walking home from a tai chi class when it began to snow quite heavily. In that moment, I realised that I had a choice. I could either complain to myself about how cold it was, or I could decide to enjoy the very unusual experience of being surrounded by whirling snowflakes. As I decided to enjoy the snow, I suddenly found the dancing snowflakes really funny. I actually laughed out loud with joy as I immersed myself in the beauty of moment, without entertaining any worries whatsoever about getting cold or wet.

I have always loved the purity and magic of snow, so I am not claiming that finding joy in a snowstorm was a really challenging practice for me. However, if I get a bad cold or a headache, finding joy or peace moment to moment is certainly much more of a challenge. Nevertheless, I now enjoy challenging myself like this. For example, if I have a streaming cold I can see it as the universe kindly allowing me to watch some daytime TV without feeling too guilty about it. If I have a headache, I try to see it as an opportunity to be extra caring and compassionate towards my suffering-self. I nurture myself as I imagine a really loving mother would nurture her sick child – and then I go to look for the paracetamol.

What about you? If you normally complain a lot about life – join the club! But maybe you have noticed that when we all get together to share our complaints about our lives and the

world, the outcome is not one of universal peace and joy. Even when we are just complaining about something inside our own head, we usually end up feeling even more upset, rather than comforted by that complaining voice and energy.

Complaining constantly is actually a self-sabotaging, bad habit. But please, please do not beat yourself up if –after you read this message – you begin to notice just how many of your conversations include a complaint about something or someone.

I have been practising mindfulness for many, many years now, and I still notice that I have a really strong tendency to complain about the world, especially politicians and/or anyone who seems to me to be very negative about life. I now know that we all love to complain about others because we instinctively want to make them ‘the guilty ones’ so that we can play the role of an innocent victim of a wicked world.

But this is really a self-defeating strategy because we cannot get rid of our deep senses of unworthiness by projecting it out onto others. In fact, the more we see unworthiness in others, the more we confirm our own unworthiness. On the other hand, the more we overlook and forgive errors in others, the more we find that we can forgive ourselves for our own mistakes. Of course, this also works the other way around. The more we compassionately reassure ourselves that all our mistakes are easily corrected by a much higher power, the more we can overlook others’ mistakes to see their eternal innocence behind the façade of bad behaviour.

This is rather like knowing the difference between someone brilliantly acting the role of a villain in a Soap Opera and their real behaviour and personality as an actor. In fact, if like Shakespeare, we begin to see that the whole world is just like a stage and all of us are just playing many different temporary roles upon it, we can also begin to let go of the dangerous belief that others are doing us real harm and that we have every right to keep complaining about their harmful behaviour.

We can be like a band of travelling players who beat each other up on stage every night and then hug each other with love and appreciation once the play has finished. Or we can see everything that ever happens to us in this world as like a dream that we are dreaming, and then we can no longer blame other dream figures for harming us in *our* dream.

I seem to have wandered a long way from the snow, but I hope you get my drift (ha, ha). Whether the sun is shining on us, or sleet is pelting down on us, we always have one real choice in life. We can choose to be miserable, or we can find something to cheer about, even in the most challenging of situations.

So this month, please do something every day that brings you real joy. Take time to sit and listen to a favourite piece of music, read an inspiring book, or watch a heart-warming film. Never tell yourself that engaging in joyful activities such as these is a waste of time. Each and every time you experience true joy in your heart and mind, you add another life-enhancing drop of positive energy to our world. Without even trying to do good, your inner joy becomes a beautiful blessing for others to share. How wonderful!

Peggy Foster
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