



Triumph of Heart

WHAT LEADS TO TRIUMPH OF THE HEART? - Joseph Goldstein

There is an important lesson here about the sustaining power of lovingkindness. Because it does not depend on any particular quality in the other person, this kind of love does not transform easily into ill will, anger, or irritation, as love with desire or attachment so often does. Such unconditional love comes only from our own generosity of heart. Although we may recognize the purity and power of this feeling, we may fear or imagine that this kind of love lies beyond our capacity. But metta is not a power that belongs only to the Dalai Lama or Mother Teresa or some extraordinary being categorically different from ourselves. We can all practice it and learn to love in this way. The question for us is, how can we do it? What makes this inclusiveness possible?

A number of years ago, the Harvard Medical Journal included an article about a Tibetan doctor named Tenzin Chodak, who had been a personal physician to the Dalai Lama. In 1959, Dr. Chodak was imprisoned by the Chinese. For seventeen of the twenty-one years he remained in prison, he was beaten and tortured daily—physically and psychologically—and his life was continually threatened. Astonishingly, he emerged from this horror virtually free from signs of post-traumatic stress.

In the article, Dr. Chodak distills the wisdom we need to understand into four points of understanding, which made possible not only his survival—people survive horrendous conditions in many ways—but also the great triumph of his heart. A short biographical sketch of him by Claude Levenson describes him in this way: “Dr. Chodak could easily pass unnoticed, until you meet his gaze—a gaze filled with the perception of one who has seen so much that he has seen everything, seeing beyond the suffering he has experienced,

beyond all the evil and the abuses he has witnessed, yet expressing boundless compassion for his fellow human beings.”

FOUR INSIGHTS IN TIMES OF DISTRESS

First, we must endeavor to see every situation in a larger context. Like the Dalai Lama—who often speaks of how one’s enemy teaches one patience—Dr. Chodak saw his enemy as his spiritual teacher, who led him to the wisest and most compassionate place in himself. Accordingly, he felt that even in the most dreadful and deplorable circumstances some human greatness, some greatness of heart could be accomplished. Of course, thinking this is easy; the challenge is to remember and apply this understanding in times of difficulty.

Second, we must see our enemies, or the difficult people in our lives, as human beings like ourselves. Dr. Chodak never forgot the commonality of the human condition. The “law of karma” means that all our actions have consequences: actions bear fruit based on the intentions behind them. People who act cruelly toward us are actually in adverse circumstances, just as we are, creating unwholesome karma that will bring about their own future suffering.

But we mustn’t fall into thinking of karma as “they’ll get theirs,” as a kind of vehicle for cosmic revenge. Rather, seeing the universal human condition can become a wellspring of compassion. The Dalai Lama said, “Your enemies may disagree with you, may be harming you, but in another aspect, they are still human beings like you. They also have the right not to suffer and to find happiness. If your empathy can extend out like that, it is unbiased, genuine compassion.” Understanding karma—that we all reap the fruit of our actions—as a vehicle for compassion is the wisdom we could now integrate into our lives.

We're all in the same situation with regard to the great law of karmic cause and effect. Lovingkindness is a feeling that blesses others and oneself with the simple wish, "Be happy."

Third, we must let go of pride and feelings of self-importance. These attitudes, which can arise so easily in times of conflict, become the seeds of even more difficulty. It doesn't mean that we should adopt a stance of false humility or self-abnegation. Rather, we let go of the tendency toward self-aggrandizement, whether interpersonally or within the framework of our own inner psychology. A story from ancient China uses nature to illustrate the great protection of true humility:

The sage Chuang Tzu was walking with a disciple on a hilltop. They see a crooked, ancient tree without a single straight branch. The disciple says the tree is useless, nothing from it can be used, and Chuang Tzu replies, "That's the reason it's ancient. Everyone seems to know how useful it is to be useful. No one seems to know how useful it is to be useless."

Dr. Chodak actually attributed his survival to the ability to let go of self-importance and self-righteousness. This insight provides a tremendous lesson on the spiritual journey, a lesson that can come up for all of us again and again. Finally, the insight that nourished Dr. Chodak's amazing triumph of the heart, and one we must truly understand ourselves, is that hatred never ceases through hatred; it ceases only in response to love. Many spiritual traditions acknowledge this truth. In situations of conflict, lovingkindness and compassion grow when we understand them to be the most beneficial motivation for responsive and effective action.

Can we hold these perspectives, even in less trying circumstances? When someone is very angry with you or you're in some difficult situation, remember that this difficulty itself can strengthen patience and love. In these situations, we can investigate what greatness of heart we might accomplish, remind ourselves that everyone involved shares the common bond of humanity, let go of pride, and understand that, in the end, hatred and enmity will only cease by love.

Set the Compass of Your Heart **-Jack Kornfield**

You need a reliable compass to set your direction and steer through the rough waters when you are going through hard times, when you've been betrayed, when you've lost your job, when you've lost friends or loved ones, when you're in conflict with your family, or when you're going through illness.

But how can you set your direction when you can't see any clear harbor? And how can you navigate through difficult waters when you're swamped by overwhelming emotions, when so much of your awareness is taken over with trying to figure out who's at fault and who did what to whom, or creating stories about who's wrong and who's right and why?

When we're overwhelmed by a difficult situation, sometimes we know we're behaving in a way that is only making matters worse, but we don't know how to stop.

No matter what situation we find ourselves in, we can always set our compass to our highest intentions in the present moment. Perhaps it is nothing more than being in a heated conversation with another person and stopping to take a breath and ask yourself, "What is my highest intention in this moment?" If you can have enough awareness to take this small step, your heart will give you an answer that will take the conversation in a different, more positive direction. With simple steps like these, you can behave in ways that at least will not fuel your difficulties—or anyone else's.

Whatever your difficulties—a devastated heart, financial loss, feeling assaulted by the conflicts around you, or a seemingly hopeless illness—you can always remember that you are free in every moment to set the compass of your heart to your highest intentions. In fact, the two things that you are always free to do—despite your circumstances—are to be present and to be willing to love.
