Announcements

General announcements from Recovery Dharma.

COVID-19 Meeting Updates

With the global rise of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapidly changing requirements of local sanghas and their meeting spaces, Community volunteers in Recovery Dharma (RD) jumped in and assisted groups with going online through Zoom and other platforms. The community found solutions for listing meetings that went online, how to start online meetings, and how members could find a meeting if in need of one. If you are still looking for meetings please use the "Covid-19 meeting directory" and if you have a meeting to add, please submit it. We want to give recognition and gratitude to Kris Roehling and Craig Wilkie for all the work they put in getting this directory up and running and for keeping it up-to-date. We are amazed that we have around 200 meetings online now!
Circles

- **Wise Friendships**: After much amazing work from the Wise Friendship Circle, review by the Literature and Inclusion circles, and then incorporating feedback from the larger community, we now have a guide for *Wise Friendships in RD*. You can also view the community feedback meeting recording on our *YouTube channel*!

- **Literature And Community Wisdom**: These two circles have been collaborating for several months facilitating online community wisdom workshops, which were all recorded with accompanying written guides. This has truly been a community collaborative endeavor! Thank you to all who have attended the Community Wisdom workshops. Your feedback and wisdom has helped us produce these guides and FAQs!

  - **How to Start a Meeting**: you can also view the recorded video workshop.
  - **RD: Where do I begin (video workshop)**; FAQ coming soon!
  - **Online Meetings: How-To; FAQ coming soon!**

- **Community Wisdom Online Workshops are now monthly**! The Community Wisdom (CW) Circle has decided to make community wisdom workshops ongoing, monthly events. Calls will happen *on the second Wednesday of each month* (note that we changed the regular monthly date from the first to the second Wednesdays of the month) at the same time, 5:30 p.m. PT/8:30 p.m. ET.

  - Our next CW workshop will be Wednesday, May 13th: Wise Friendships. Details to come! [Join Zoom Meeting](#)  
    Meeting ID: 140 816 780  
    One tap mobile  
    +16699006833,140816780# US (San Jose)  
    +13462487799,140816780# US (Houston)

  - Want to provide suggestions for future Community Wisdom workshops? Please fill out a brief [survey available online](#).
Conference

While the in-person 2020 Recovery Dharma Sangha Summit in Salt Lake City, Utah, was cancelled due to the pandemic, the conference is still on! Thanks to all those who provided feedback on our survey about the upcoming conference. As a result of community feedback, the conference committee is hard at work planning an online version of the conference to be held during the same weekend as previously planned—July 31 - Aug. 2. We hope that this will allow even more members of our wonderful community to attend the conference and learn and meditate together. Stay tuned for more information soon regarding registration and session topics!

YouTube

Our Recovery Dharma YouTube channel has new guided meditations in addition to the community wisdom workshop recordings.

Insight Timer

We have meditations on Insight Timer!

Update from the Board

Hi sangha—we hope everyone is doing their best, staying safe and taking care. Your Board of Directors has been working hard and we have a few updates for you:

At its April meeting, the Board elected Dirk Wethington to serve as President, Kris Roehling to serve as Treasurer, and Lacey Browne to serve as Secretary. Also, Lawrence Gould, Beth Coyote, and Gary Matulis have stepped down from the Board and we thank them for their service.

From the start, our Facebook groups were intended to be community (not Board)-managed. Kara Bella and Joel Osterman have been serving as admins for the groups and, as newly elected Board members, they'll be stepping down from that role shortly so that we can return to a purely community-led approach. The newly configured Social Media Team will give you an update on admins once this all gets figured out. Kara and Joel have been tireless in
their support of our Facebook community so please give them a
shout of appreciation when you have a moment.

Dan Oliverio has been working hard on our website reboot (the
current website got up and running in about a week due to what
was happening at the time, which meant that it doesn't have a full-
on Recovery Dharma identity). Dan is the lead for our website 2.0
and he brings his design skills and love of our community into
everything he's doing for the site. Look for more info on that
coming soon.

Finally, it is with a mix of many emotions that we announce the
resignation of Jean Tuller from the Board and the majority of her
active service work to Recovery Dharma. We are grateful for her
tireless work and engagement, and will be forever in her debt.

If you’d like to read the Board of Directors’ meeting minutes or
Treasurer’s Report, please visit our website.

Recent elections resulted in a Board of Directors for Recovery
Dharma that’s entirely made up of people of European descent.
This board understands that our strength lies in a diverse
leadership and are committed to finding a remedy to the current
lack of diversity and inclusion.

Therefore, the Recovery Dharma Board is asking for input from
people of color to help inform the best way to go about meeting
this goal. We make this invitation with all humility, mindful of the
ways in which we, as white people, have been unskillful in
addressing issues of racial exclusion and oppression. We intend this
as a first step on a long journey, not the last.

"This sense of home and refuge, for me, came from
searching for and finding others who could support me,
validate me, mirror my experience. It was not something I
could have done by myself. I'd need a community that I
could call home in order to embody and internalize deeply
for myself that I am worthy of belonging in this world,
regardless of external conditions."

– Larry Yang, Awakening Together: The Spiritual Practice of
Inclusivity and Community
My Path

Melissa's Story of Recovery

Twenty-two years ago this May I graduated high school from an all-girls college preparatory school in Saint Louis, Missouri, that prided itself on the empowerment of women. Since that time, the word “empowerment” has always carried weight in my life. In high school, it started with such activities as protesting the death penalty on the courthouse steps and traveling to Latin America to volunteer. From that point forward, I have felt confident and emboldened as a female moving through life. However, this term of “empowerment” took on new meaning and began to carry an even more significant meaning in my life when I discovered Recovery Dharma in the fall of 2019. Recovery Dharma proclaimed to be a “program of empowerment that doesn’t ask us to believe in anything other than our own potential.” This was the first time in my recovery that I truly believed that this power and authority over my destiny was in my charge.

My story begins in a small, rural town just outside of St. Louis, Missouri. I am the oldest of two kids and was born to a young, Catholic couple. There was nothing special or outstanding about my early childhood, but by the time I reached my pre-teen years,
my life became challenging. I was a straight-A student, I was quiet and timid, and I was made fun of relentlessly by my peers at school. I wanted nothing more than to fit in and to be one of the “cool kids.” I attended Catholic school from first grade until the time I left for college, and in seventh grade, after much pleading, tears, and an eventual passive suicide threat, my parents moved me and my brother from one parochial school to another. Much to my chagrin, things were not much different at the new school. I withdrew even further and begged to stay home sick from school. When high school started, things changed for me. The summer after my freshman year, I went on a sister-city student exchange to Germany. I was the youngest of the exchange students—all the others being juniors and seniors—and it was at this time that I had my first true drunk. I can vividly remember that warm, soothing feeling of drinking wine, sitting in the sunshine, and the immediate comfort and sense of belonging that it brought to me. The drinking continued for the duration of my trip—visiting Hofbrauhaus in Munich, attending various Strassenfests, and socializing in many beer gardens. I threw up for the first time (and second, and third…), but it didn't faze me. I kept going back for more.

Upon my return home, life more or less returned to normal. Due to a parental job transfer I switched high schools mid-way through and spent most of my junior and senior years living with aunts, uncles, and friends in the city. I was a casual drinker, dabbled in some drugs, but the fighting with my dad was out-of-control as we could never seem to see eye-to-eye, and I headed as far away as possible for college. I received a scholarship to University of Arizona in Tucson, and this is where my drinking career took off. Away from home, alone, and wanting to fit in, I did what I thought it was that you did in college—party. For the first time in my life, I was released from the grip of my parents’ control, and I went wild. I loved college.

Religion has been difficult for me. I never identified with the Catholic belief system, but still always sought some sort of spirituality and ethical guidance in my life journey. I appreciate that this Recovery Dharma program offers me guiding practices and principles in life through a secular lens as well as provides a “toolbox” for my recovery.
Dharma Toolbox

Mindful Self-Compassion

I was introduced to Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) while in residential rehab. It was the most powerful tool I learned while in treatment. It became a regular practice for me and has since become invaluable during this pandemic and isolation.

MSC was developed by two psychologists: Kristen Neff, PhD, and Chris Germer, PhD. It has been used as an effective tool for treating PTSD, interpersonal conflict, psychological well-being, suffering, disordered eating, body image, anxiety, depression, problematic alcohol use, and many more areas!

For me, MSC works by helping me sit with uncomfortable emotions. That’s a bit of an understatement—it truly saved my life. For me, my addiction was largely fed by a need to escape the feelings, thoughts, memories, and physical sensations that were a result of a long history of trauma and depression. MSC was the key tool I used when getting sober and all of a sudden I was having to feel all these intense emotions: all of the feelings I’d been working so hard to escape came flooding in. Some people felt euphoria and relief when they first got sober. I felt all the years of trauma symptoms I’d been covering up with drugs and alcohol. It was horrible and difficult to manage until I was introduced to MSC.

MSC is many practices that share common components. In fact, one of the Recovery Dharma meditations—Meditation for Sitting with Difficult Emotions—is based on an MSC practice. The way it was taught to me in rehab was that MSC has three main elements: Mindfulness, Common Humanity, and Self-Kindness.

Mindfulness

In the context of MSC, mindfulness is being able to observe, without judgment, what I am thinking, feeling, and experiencing. This allows me to step back from identifying with what I’m experiencing. Over-identifying with the emotions and thoughts I experience (believing I am those thoughts and emotions) contributes to the experience of suffering. I can experience pain without suffering and mindfulness is the tool to get me there. Sometimes I practice this by noticing the language I use to
describe or talk about how I’m feeling, shifting from “I’m sad” to “I’m experiencing sadness,” or “this is a moment of suffering/sadness.” I sometimes bring in aspects of what meditation teacher Tara Brach and psychologist Dr. Marsha Linehan call Radical Acceptance: completely and totally accepting something without fighting reality. I do this by using a phrase like “I accept that right now I’m experiencing a strong desire to drink/use.” All of these mindfulness practices allow me to acknowledge and accept the experience I’m having, which has been incredibly powerful and healing, in addition to helping me be present with the harder feelings.

**Common Humanity**

Many of us who have struggled with addiction and substance use disorders feel alone and separate from others. The common humanity component of MSC helps me feel connected to others and less alone with what I’m feeling. It is as simple as stating “Many people are struggling right now,” “it’s human to suffer,” or “anyone would have a hard time with this”—some phrase that acknowledges what I’m feeling is something others experience. As I write this, we are heading into week four of the COVID-19 shelter-in-place experience. This is a very real example of common humanity. We are globally experiencing something scary and difficult, and many of us are sharing emotional ups and downs, confusion and difficulty keeping track of what day it is, fear, and scarcity, to name a few. I felt less alone and more connected when I am reminded of these shared experiences. Experiencing common humanity leads me to feel less suffering.

**Self-Kindness**

The ways I’ve practiced Self-Kindness have included practicing Metta (also referred to as “Loving-Kindness”) with self-focus. I was guided through a process where I was asked the following questions:

- What do I need? (something that without it, my day will not feel complete)
- What words do I need to hear from others?

*continued on page 13*
Between the Lines

The Recovery Dharma Newsletter Book Review

So about the Land of Oz.

My favorite scene is when Dorothy is stuck in the witch’s castle. She’s on one side of the door, staring aghast at the sand running out of the hourglass. Her companions, led by her gallant little dog Toto, have snuck into the castle in an against-all-odds rescue mission. The Tin Woodman shouts, “Stand back!” and frees her by attacking the door with his axe to the strains of Night on Bald Mountain. The witch almost catches them, but Dorothy melts her by accident in an act of compassion, saving her friend the Straw Man from burning up.

I always thought of Dorothy’s companions as parts of herself that she has lost somehow, and then gets back. Her strong self, the Tin Woodman, who starts crying when he sees the castle, “I hate thinking of her in there! We’ve got to get her out!” and then is the hero who bashes down the door. Her critical thinking self, the Straw Man who reminds everybody that they don’t have time to jump up and down and hug, they have to get the heck out of there. And her courageous self, the Cowardly Lion, who manages to help his friends despite his fears. And Glinda, the Tough Love Mama, who does eventually send her home but only after reminding her that she, Dorothy, helped herself—by having courage, compassion and insight.

And whatever you might think about Depression-era Kansas as a place to make your home, the fact is that Dorothy wanted to be home more than anything else, and she cried with relief when she got there. She recovers herself. She recovers joy.

So maybe you’ve been sober a while and you’ve done some work and you’ve been recovering lost pieces of yourself, and you’re wondering, is there more? Have you started to experience some equanimity and ease, and feel ready to move on to happiness?

Kevin Griffin, in Recovering Joy: A Mindful Life After Addiction, has a Yellow Brick Road for you.
Recovering Joy was published in 2014, just as Buddhist recovery was getting some traction on the West Coast. In it, Griffin provides a road map that skillfully blends 12-Step practice with the Eightfold Path, getting us past the hindrances of craving, resentment, apathy, anxiety, and doubt that obstruct us from creating a truly joyful life.

The first half of the book deals with understanding that happiness doesn’t come from acquiring more things, but from letting go of the conditioning and beliefs that hold us down. He then goes through each of the 12 Steps from a Buddhist perspective, and then follows it with a great explanation of the Eightfold Path and how to use it to create a peaceful life.

The last half of the book is a practical set of exercises to create happiness, starting with the question, “Do you want to be happy?” Choosing happiness comes first. Then, you can set your intention to find joy in each day.

These exercises walk you through setting intentions in the foundations of happiness: integrity, relationships, work, fun, money, health, identity and values, inner life, and spiritual growth. Once your intentions are set, he has ways to create accountability, allowing you to bring these intentions into reality—taking action, making these actions central to your life, and finally, learning to appreciate the gifts that come to you.

I found this book to be an extremely helpful, practical guide, and a good companion to Buddhist recovery meetings, inventories/inquiries, and book study. It’s not as easy as clicking your heels three times and waking up at home in Kansas with yourself, but it works.

May you be happy!

If you’d like to submit an article for the Recovery Dharma Newsletter, contact us at newsletter@recoverydharma.org. Please see our newsletter guidelines.
Buddhist Perspective
on Early Sobriety, Suffering, and Seeing

I identify as female and as a sober person, and I fucking love creativity. They help me cultivate the fuck out of joy, but I know, I know, I would be cool and definitely okay if they ever fell apart.

In fact, all the stuff could fall the fuck apart, and I would be okay. Between the Buddhist practices I’ve been exposed to and the incredible community of Recovery Dharma, I have had such an education in navigating through the joys, pains, and impermanence of life. Through this recovery education, a greater sense of deep peace and unconditional wellness have been cultivated in me, and, for that, I am forever grateful.

That said, the mission of this column is to talk about the beauty and hardship of sobriety. So in this first article, I’m going to cover some good ol’ suffering, sensations, and how I can get confused with what the fuck to do with these phenomena, while trying to make way for a newly sober life.

The Suffering that Leads to the End of Suffering

There is an expression I’ve heard a lot in the meditation talks and shares of Recovery Dharma: “the suffering that leads to the end of suffering.” I like this expression because it reminds me that suffering is necessary.

There is a kind of suffering that carries us to the other side of something. It is a profound and beautiful vessel to rest upon, albeit messy AF. It is the kind of suffering that has space; the kind that doesn’t need to burrow a hole between the eyes, doesn’t own judgement, doesn’t answer to a deadline, a shitty job, or a shitty person; a suffering that acknowledges itself, the body, and, most of all, the heart—that huge and amazing space in all beings that can harbor compassion, patience, and serenity for the self, not-self, and all things. This is the suffering that leads to the end of suffering.

*continued on page 14*
My Path

continued from page 6

I graduated shortly after 9/11. I liked using 9/11 as an excuse for why I could not find a job. Regardless, I moved back to Missouri, spent a couple of years in limbo, and then returned to the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2003 to work on another degree. It was here that I started working at a wine shop and eventually transitioned into the restaurant business. I developed a passion for food and wine and also the lifestyle that the hospitality industry provided. While attending school, I worked as a server at a fine dining restaurant, and this is where I met my future husband. Ours was a relationship built on late nights, drinking, and socializing with industry friends. I graduated, got married, moved to Jackson, Wyoming, and landed my first “real” job as a registered dietitian all within a month in May of 2007. Our life in Jackson didn’t last long, and we moved to Colorado where we owned a restaurant for several years, which further enabled what had become a heavy, daily drinking habit, making it not only acceptable, but expected. My marriage ended shortly after the closing of our restaurant, and my life continued in the wine and spirits business until I relocated to Western Colorado from the Boulder/Denver area. Teaching others about wine, curating wine lists, “working the floor” as a sommelier, and drinking wine became my identity and my life. It was beyond a passion; it was an obsession.

In April 2016, things started to change for me. I was bored and was running from one travel adventure to the next. I couldn’t sit still. I was uncomfortable in my own skin. I had a million acquaintances, but few friends. I drank most heavily when I was alone, any and all times of day. I began to notice that I didn’t even enjoy the taste of alcohol anymore, but drank just for the effects—to help me sleep, to quell my racing mind, to put me at ease, to relax and comfort me, you get the idea. My divorce was not yet finalized, but I was feeling antsyier than ever, and decided to walk the Camino de Santiago in Spain in the spring of 2016. I could write a book on this pilgrimage alone, but will suffice to say that this was a life-changing experience. Over the course of five weeks, I walked over 1000 kilometers, carrying with me just an 11-pound backpack. On our last night in Muxia, my Italian travel companion whom I had met along the way, said to me, “Melissa, do you think that you may drink too much?” Hurt and embarrassed, my immediate reaction was anger, but, wow, did this strike a chord. For years, I had asked my ex-husband if he thought I drank too much, with him responding in the negative, and for years, I had tried just about every effort that, I now know, is outlined in AA’s Big Book to cut back my drinking. But, now, this man, who had come to know me like a sister after we shared in this journey together, had called me out on what I knew but refused to accept for so long.

Upon returning to the States, I started dating a guy who, as luck would have it, was sober. I was still actively drinking but did attempt a Sober October only to fail because my grandma became gravely ill during this time and eventually passed. Lesson learned—there is never a “good time” to get sober. This guy was the first person I could remember knowing in my adult life who did not drink. It made me uncomfortable. I cancelled dates, I made excuses, but the relationship grew in spite of these efforts to hinder it, and together we moved to western Colorado. I had been offered a new job with a winery/distillery and had always had a dream of owning a farm, so this was my opportunity.

Upon moving in together, it became blatantly obvious that my drinking was out of control—there is nothing more sobering than living with someone who doesn’t drink. I became a closet drinker—I would drink in the basement, in the car on my way home from work, sneak it while I was cooking dinner, you name it.

After attending an AlAnon meeting trying to be a good partner to him, I realized that I was sitting in the wrong room. I started attending AA meetings shortly thereafter, and eventually tried and stayed sober by attending 30 meetings in 30 days, and after “going to any length,” as they tell you to do in twelve-step, which for me meant quitting my job. The journey has been long and winding, and without doubt, the hardest thing I have ever done in my life. Living in a small, conservative, Christian, rural, older community, AA was difficult for me, but I “took what I needed and left the rest.” I remain forever grateful to this program that helped me to achieve sobriety. It took me the better part of almost two years of sobriety to accept and get a handle on mental illness that I was struggling with and had been self-medicating for. After various counselors and a handful of other alternative therapies, I have, for the time, identified a solution and have found that with this foundational piece of my recovery under control, I have been able to focus on other components of my recovery.

With the help of an AA sponsor who also happened to have a background in religious studies and counseling, I started to detach from my twelve-step program and seek out another program of recovery. It was purely by accident that I happened upon Recovery Dharma after learning about it on a Buddhist Recovery Network podcast. I dove right into learning about Buddhism and have found a true guide to my recovery as well as
my spiritual path in this program. Religion has been difficult for me. I never identified with the Catholic belief system, but still always sought some sort of spirituality and ethical guidance in my life journey. I appreciate that this Recovery Dharma program offers me guiding practices and principles in life through a secular lens as well as provides a “toolbox” for my recovery.

With the teaching of Recovery Dharma, in my toolbox I now have a solid daily meditation practice. Before my first RD meeting, I didn’t think that I could do meditation. It was intimidating to me. In just a short time, however, meditation has taught me to see moments of mindfulness and awareness. By using the breath or occasionally sound as my anchor, I am grounded in the present. It has taught me calm and peace—how to ease frustration, anger, fear, and shame. This program of empowerment has taught me that I am not my emotions, that I can control to a large extent my level of suffering in life, and that I have a choice of whether to respond or to react to situations. It has taught me that there is a critical, brief moment in time between when an action occurs and when I respond. Learning to identify this PAUSE and use it to my advantage has been a tremendous help in how I handle challenging situations. Reciting and incorporating the five precepts and five remembrances into my daily life has proven to be a very easy but powerful practice as well, helping me to continue work on process addictions and providing the impetus to eliminate cannabis from my life entirely about six months ago.

This program has empowered me to blaze my own trail on this recovery journey. It is non-linear; there is not one prescribed set of steps to follow. It is holistic and aims to heal the whole person. It has allowed me to see that each of us possesses wholesome and unwholesome seeds. It is which of those you “water” and nurture that determines which of these seeds will flourish. This nourishment is determined by whom I surround myself with, what activities I choose to participate in, what information I take in—all personal choices for which I have authority over. It has allowed me to rediscover the innate human characteristics of compassion and loving kindness that largely sat dormant within me for years. And, perhaps most importantly in my life, it has taught me equanimity—how to stay calm amidst a stormy sea, as Thich Nhat Hanh refers to in his story of the Vietnamese boat people.

And, finally, this program has taught me the power of sangha. For the first time in my life, I feel a sense of belonging. When I first became sober, I was at a loss. I felt abysmally alone. I was ashamed and embarrassed of where I was at in my life. Through the power of this sangha, I have learned to trust and to open to others. I can be honest without fear of condemnation. I attend at least 3-4 meetings per week as well as text daily with Dharma friends and speak weekly with another friend regarding inquiry questions.

In my day-to-day life, learning and applying self-care, which I had neglected for years, is a form of compassion and metta for myself. I focus on breathwork in daily yoga practice, and daily walks with my dogs have become a walking meditation. As an introvert, I allow myself time alone and have come to better understand my limitations. I now own an organic vegetable farm where my daily work forces me to be present and aware of my current situation. It allows me a simple life in which I am able to find and celebrate moments of joy gracefully presented such as the germination of seeds each spring, the way the morning light strikes a bed of greens, the incredible sweetness of a homegrown, heirloom carrot, or the miracle of collecting colorful eggs that my chickens lay daily. Living according to the seasons forces me to recognize impermanence and living off the land teaches me interdependence and non-self. This practice has grounded me and taught me to slow down in life. My recovery and my life’s path have become one in the same.

For me this is not only a program of empowerment, but one of hope. As I recently heard in a podcast, hope implies vulnerability and the Buddhist principle of uncertainty. Hope implies taking chances which is more difficult than taking the safe, certain path. Hopefulness does not equal optimism, but means that we personally are empowered to intervene. Recovery Dharma is a program of hope for me. There is no certainty, but there are openings that we can walk through and create beautiful new beginnings.

Dharma Toolbox

continued from page 8

I listed as many words for each and then picked the top three or four to create my own personal loving-kindness phrases. One of the mantras I came up with was:

May I value myself
May I feel held
May I feel loved and accepted
May I learn to love myself as I am

Bringing the Three Components Together in a Simple Practice

I was taught a very simple practice that can be used anytime, anywhere, and takes only a moment. This is a brief MSC practice that brings together the three components of mindfulness,
common humanity, and self-kindness. I was encouraged to use warmth and touch during my practice, so I might wrap myself in a blanket or simply rub my hands together until warm and place a hand over an area of my body where I might feel some suffering (like my heart). Then, I make a mindfulness statement about what’s going on (e.g. “this is a moment of suffering,” “this is really painful,” etc.) followed by a common humanity statement (“many people are experiencing hurt and pain right now,” “all people experience suffering,” etc.), and then ending with kind words to myself (e.g. “may I be kind and gentle with myself,” “may I be at ease,” etc.).

When I’ve experienced intense craving, when I’ve felt like my feelings were too much to handle, and, especially right now when we are all dealing with a pandemic and social isolation, I use this practice frequently. Placing one hand over my heart, I say to myself:

*This is really painful right now*

*May I be gentle with myself*

When I practice with these tools, I often experience less suffering, more self-compassion, more compassion for others, and more connection.

Be gentle with yourselves during this time!

Recovery Dharma resources related to this dharma tool include:

- **Sitting with Difficult Emotions Meditation Script**
- **Recovery Dharma YouTube Sitting with Difficult Emotions guided meditations:**
  - **Option 1**
  - **Option 2**

Do you have a practice technique or approach that might be featured in Dharma Toolbox? Please send your submissions (about 500 words) to our email address: newsletter@recoverydharma.org.

**Buddhist Perspective**

*continued from page 11*

The shit where I’m ruminating about the look my mentor gave me, or failed to, after I shared about something gross going on with me, that’s not the suffering that leads to the end of suffering. That’s just dumb suffering, or “second arrow” suffering (second arrow suffering = the suffering I create through my reaction to events).

In my experience, the difference between the two can be felt in the body. I feel an enormous letting go and surrender when I’m experiencing the suffering that leads to the end of suffering. I experience it like clenched fists finally opening.

Usually, I find that the expansive suffering always comes at the end of the “second arrow” session, and it happens no matter what. At some point, I’ll simply exhaust myself into complete defeat through rumination and proliferation of a harmful thought, until the time that the mind and body finally hit a wall and die. From this place, the “suffering that leads to the end of suffering” can finally be experienced more fully through me, since I’m too tired to fight for my second arrow any longer.

The **Starting that Leads to Terror that Leads to Teacher**

When I begin things I know or have known, when I start things I don’t know, when I engage new life material whether it be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—it be in sobriety, creativity, or relational—these experiences can trigger the dust of the fear/survival reactions. To be clear, sensations and memories and stories are all always available to be kicked up in the brain and body. Oftentimes, when I have broken my sobriety practice it has been due to my identification with these sensations. And it’s fucking scary what the mind kicks up.

Being an addict can be like trying to catch and subdue a lightning strike every time it hits. I run my entire life by decisions based upon when the lightning is going to hit again and just live in fear of the strike taking me down or not coming at all, so at the first sign of thunder, I obey. Now, that’s an exhausting and unpredictable way to live. And I’m not trying to demonize sensations as these crazy things, like bad lightning or jerk wind. I’m trying to normalize the wacky, normal, occurrence of sensation in the body/brain/mind that is especially wacky in early sobriety. Here’s how it can go:

Something gets stimulated somehow, and a story (the thing I’m telling myself) sparks in me the idea that I’m “not OK” or “not enough” without this “thing” or “experience,” so I go ahead and make a reason to find a way to use my desired substance or process to quench the fear. Now this logically makes sense. Problem? Make a solution. Ouch? Kill ouch. What’s missing throughout this process is autonomy and volition. I’ve never really made a choice. I have been part of a deduction, at best.

Now, I could go all day and night analyzing why I do this (which I love analyzing down by the way), or there is another option in the moment of craving, which I discovered through mentorship and RD: I can hold what sensations are actually here in the moment and
honor the sensations as newcomers and transients into my house for weary travelers and just let ’em sleep off their bad day. I am allowed to allow everybody into my Katie’s Safe Sensation House for Transients, but they are confused and super tired, so I don’t have to do what they say.

The point is, it doesn’t matter right now what’s triggering me (though I personally find it useful to trace the roots back to causes/triggers etc. over the long run of sobriety); what matters is in the moment when I’m losing my mind on day three in animal mode, and I’m about to pop a pill, drink, or track down a partner and do harm to myself, I may not be available to fucking trace back the roots of my life-conditioning systems just in that moment. That’s where this spacious acknowledgement of the bodily view of everything is key.

**What is Happening and What is My Relationship to It?**

Some wisdom I’ve felt during my curiosity and terror around craving has brought me this: just because something hurts doesn’t mean it is bad, and just because something feels good doesn’t make it right. Really, that’s why the five precepts of Buddhism are there. Our bodies/brains lie. They say all kinds of stuff. Especially in my American society the body/brain minds are so totally confused and fucked and beautiful, but I don’t have to listen. Through all this confusion, gifts like the five precepts are a way to commit, to just keep going, and let shit work itself out.

The more I get to know the craving through pushing up against my edges, i.e. starting new things, renunciation, meditation and other practices, the more I see the truth of things. Shit happens, and I just keep walking forward asking, “what’s happening?” and “how can I be with this?”

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**CREDITS**

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