

## **In the Here and Now**

There is a Buddhist expression that is called "living outside the law". I've been meditating on this now for two weeks. It has to do with living in the past or the future as opposed to "in the now". Basically, it amounts to allowing outside noise to distract us from focusing on the here and now. That is, when our thoughts constantly return to events of the past, to outside happenstance, or to the "what ifs" of the future with all their possible ramifications, we are living in the outside world, not in the law of the "here and now". The here and now are the elements of the moment. From moment to moment, if we seek to control our thoughts by choosing what to focus on, we can live away from the distractions of the outside world and the worries that come with those distractions.

This is not to say that we cannot focus on the outside world as necessary. After all, not all of us are monks and our life's purpose will always be different from that of another, and most likely will require that we pay some attention to outside influences. As it stands, focusing on the outside world is the means to survive for most of us. The difference between obsessing and focusing, however, is extreme. Focusing means paying attention to the areas that require attention, as a means to an end. Obsessing is paying attention to areas where there is no resolve and thus, feeding distraction that creates an imbalance in our heart, mind and spirit.

Attention is an important element in focus, whether inside or outside. When we pay attention to what is happening on the inside rather than the outside, and learn to control the internal noise that we create, we can reach a state of calm regardless of the noise on the outside. However, when we pay attention to what is happening on the outside, it agitates and, at best, creates distraction, leaving our energy and concentration drained. At worst, it creates fear and chaos, creating an imbalance in bodily functions as well contributing to mental, spiritual, and emotional deterioration.

I have spent two weeks meditating on this Buddhist wisdom. My personal situation was such that I was concerned about a major change in my life. I could see many possibilities as the end result. Because of the fear involved with that end result, I could have spent the next two months worrying that there might be additional problems to deal with. Instead, I calmed myself and began to control my thoughts. I took deep breaths and focused on a positive outcome. Rather than obsessing, I turned the problem over to my higher self and lived each day as if it were the last, letting go of the worry that so often distracts the majority of us from joy.

The result came sooner than I expected with the most productive and possible resolution. My problem, which I could have built into a monumental issue, disappeared of its own resolve without any extra effort on my part. This is not to say that every problem has a simple solution; it is meant to illustrate that spending an enormous amount of energy worrying about events of the past and the future do not resolve problems or bring internal peace.

If you live a day at a time, you will be more apt to notice the small acts of kindness and beauty that grace us everyday; acts that we miss when we live outside the law and allow uncontrollable noise and events to distract us. Only self-reflection and inner discipline, which develop as a result of moment-to-moment concentrated focus, can bring peace and joy, especially in a chaotic world.

As the holiday seasons approach and as our world continues to play out the cosmic drama of war, focus on the small things that allow us to see beauty, feel peace, and act kindly, rather than becoming entangled in the fear, guilt and sorrow of the outside world. This will feed the Buddha within you and the holiday spirit will kindle your heart, in harmony with the law of life and existence.