

The Gifts of Adversity

by *Maha Sattwa*

For me the most precious discovery on the spiritual path is that the everyday challenges of life can be fuel for our inner growth. We all face difficulties in life. Learning to transform those situations is a tremendous gift.

Our minds are conditioned by our upbringing, by society, our schooling and by so many other influences. This conditioning is so deeply ingrained, and directly informs our preferences, habits and sense of self-identity. On the whole this is not a problem when life is flowing smoothly. But inevitably things happen to challenge those unquestioned assumptions that we hold so dear. This can be disconcerting, even threatening, as our sense of self is seemingly put into question. If the situation is intense enough, it may even feel like an earth-shattering experience as the ground of our very existence opens up underneath our feet. This leaves us adrift in an ocean of uncertainty with the mind desperately looking for something solid to cling to.

Letting go of that very tight grip we have on how things should be allows us to open up to greater possibilities. Instead of living by the narrow definitions of our conditioned mind, we start to expand our horizons. We start to live in a world that is far richer and infinitely more vibrant, vivid and fresh. This process of letting go is something that happens naturally as an integral part of life. We can see how some of the things we held so dear in childhood, or even just a few years ago, might seem fairly insignificant now. It can, however, also be something we can cultivate within ourselves. A mental holding on is often reflected in physical tension in the body. Letting go of the physical muscular tension can trigger a corresponding mental release.

This is where the practice of awareness is so valuable. Once we develop the capacity to observe our bodies, our emotions, and our minds' storylines, we become more aware of what is going on within ourselves. We start to see the whole of our inner environment and its content.

The process of letting go of our conditioning can be a challenging one, but as with most things in life, the greater the challenge the greater the reward. A healthy dose of both courage and determination is required to overcome the various obstacles that life brings. If we can persevere through the tough times, things will eventually shift and we will come out the other side with a new perspective and approach to life. Keeping this potential for transformation in mind whilst in the midst of turmoil enables us to recognize the seemingly insurmountable obstacles as opportunities in disguise. The understanding that pain and hardship are a necessary and worthwhile part of our transformation and growth makes the challenges a little easier to bear. We begin to trust that it's always worth it in the end.

Letting go of our conditioning allows us to delve into the hidden vastness within our being. We start to tap into our inner beauty that all too often remains hidden. Connecting with the inner self is of infinite value. It not only nourishes, but ultimately completes us. Instead of always living in the world of our thinking rational minds, we step into being-ness. We come home to ourselves when the scattered, dualistic nature of the mind recedes, leaving us in peace within the steadiness of our Being. The more we nurture this inner connection, and the more we can embody the sense of simply being, the more it becomes authentic for us. We start to live our lives from another standpoint altogether, one from where we are able to contribute to the world, in a more peaceful, harmonious and loving way.

As we journey along the spiritual path it can be infinitely helpful if we can align the strength of our emotions with the intention of this exploration. Our emotions can be the fuel that keeps us going on the journey. Chanting is a wonderful way of channelling emotions into our spiritual practice. The emotional charge we put into our chanting reflects the strength of any given mood we may be feeling. Using our voice in this unique way allows us to express feelings that we may not be able to express in other ways.

The longer we keep walking down this road of discovery and awareness, the more we come to see and accept ourselves as we are. The more we explore our inner environment, the more we start to experience the vastness of our being. The more we let go, the more we start to relax within ourselves. We come to live in ease and merge into the infinite fullness of who we really are.

Now, isn't that worth a bit of trouble along the way?