

April, 2008 Newsletter

The Universe Is Perfect

Perfect? Yes. Perfect. It is one of the most difficult aspects of spiritual truth for us to comprehend. Even if we do comprehend it, it is not intended to suggest that we adopt an attitude of complacency toward life. It doesn't require that we turn a blind eye to injustice, unkindness, dishonesty and cruelty. It merely invites us to let go of our internal conflict with the way of the world. It invites us to stop arguing with reality. It invites us to let go of our expectation that things should be different than they are at this moment.

From a purely practical point of view, cultivating the ability to allow things to be just as they are is an important step on the road to joy. The mind keeps replaying the past. It seems to believe that merely thinking and obsessing about what has already happened, resenting and regretting things and events that are over, will somehow change history. It won't. The pursuit of "answers," the need to understand and affix blame somewhere, only stands in the way of moving on....moving toward joy and contentment.

The world is as it is. What has happened had to happen. There is no way to change it. The way things are in this moment is a direct result of all of the factors and events that have led up to this moment. Things are as they are today as a result of what happened yesterday, and the day before that, and so on. We can learn from the past, but we can't change it. We can grow. We can cultivate understanding so that we are more attuned to the effects of our own thoughts and actions. We can resolve to make the world a better place, despite the fact that it is already "perfect."

Making the world a better place happens when we ourselves become an embodiment of a higher truth, a greater realization. Mahatma Gandhi said, "We must *become* the change we wish to see in the world." It's a simple, straightforward concept. In fact, it is the *only* way to effect real change in the world. As long as we are caught in an endless expectant wait for others to change, we are stuck. As long as we believe that some external condition has to change or someone's behavior has to change so that

we can be happy, we will be spinning our wheels in the mud of frustration and dissatisfaction.

The minute we resolve to “be the change we wish to see in the world,” real transformation takes place. When we no longer *expect* others to be sweet, and kind, and generous to us before we are willing to reciprocate, we can be sweet, and kind, and generous to them...no matter what. In doing, we naturally become happy. We no longer need a response, a “thank you,” and expression of recognition or gratitude. We do what we do, simply because it is just *more fun* to be loving...whether people receive it, or acknowledge it, or appreciate it, doesn't matter. Our reward comes from the joy inherent in being a living expression of the highest part of ourselves. We act from our love rather than from our minds. Pure and unconditional, divine love – itself – is “perfect.”

In recent years, we can't help but notice how very isolated, disconnected, and self-centered our culture has become. So many people are living as if they are the only person in the world, thinking that their happiness and safety are all that matters, acting as if no one else exists. My family was very concerned with good manners and etiquette. They taught us a protocol for nearly every situation. When I was a rebellious teenager, I thought that their codes of behavior were just meaningless, uptight rigidity. But now, when I reflect on the effects of good manners, I realize that manners are really about paying attention, being alert, acknowledging that there is someone in world besides you, and being kind, thoughtful and considerate to them.

Consciously cultivating manners can be a superb spiritual exercise. They can offer a profound tool for cultivating a state of perpetual meditation in everyday life. After all, meditation is largely about *paying attention*. And manners are about *paying attention*. Meditation can be about learning to see God everywhere, in everything. Manners can be about treating others, even absolute strangers, as God in human form. As Christ said, “In so much as you do this unto the least of these, you do it unto me.”

When we attempt to live in our own isolated little cocoons of consciousness, we are doing so with a desire to *protect* ourselves. But the end result is that we *isolate*

ourselves. Living instead with a heightened, intentional awareness of the other people in our environment is a major step on the path to joy. Stop. Look. Wait. Recognize that *everyone* you encounter is God in human form. No matter how bizarre they look, or how bizarre they act, they are God in human form.

Why not try letting God go first? Smile. Greet God with a warm “hello.” Hold the door for the next incarnation of God, and the next incarnation after that. Let God pull out of the side street. Let God merge in front of you. Let God have the coveted parking space. Say “please” and “thank you” to God. Most incarnations of God won’t notice or acknowledge. Some incarnations of God will act numb. Some will seem confused and suspicious. Occasionally, a particularly interesting incarnation of God will respond with hostility. You offer God kindness, and He reacts as if you just spat on Him. Like a great Zen teacher.

But every now and then some form of God will lift Her or His face and look you directly in the eyes, smile broadly, and say “thank you.” And you know – in that instant – that you just changed God’s life a little bit.

There is no denying the fact that when we look at the world around us, much of it seems totally *imperfect*. I have even heard it referred to as “perfect imperfection.” The one energy behind it all is perfect. As it manifests in form, it is also perfect. But our judging minds look at it all and conclude that it isn’t perfect. We think God has made huge blunders, huge errors. We could have done it so much better. We could have created a much better universe.

Whenever I perceive my mind getting cantankerous and judgmental of other human beings and the conditions of the world, I find it useful to remember “The Five Hindrances” as delineated by Buddha. They are lust and greed, hatred and ill will, agitations, sloth and torpor, and doubt. In essence, those are the primary issues we come to earth to work on. We might see earth as a school where we incarnate because we have at least *one* of the five hindrances, if not *all* of them.

If we relate to The Five Hindrances as the “selection criteria” for all those who are admitted to live on planet earth, we might not be so surprised that our encounters with

other human beings can be so difficult at times. We have enrolled in a school where we and our fellow students are full of lust, greed, hatred, ill will, agitation, sloth, torpor and doubt.

So it isn't that the earth is full of mistakes but that we are enrolled in a kind of reform school where the other students are as corrupt and delinquent as we are. But we can't get caught in thinking it is *the others* who should change.

The only one we can change is our self.

That is what we came here for. And God, the creator, the universe, is always holding out His hand, always offering to lead us to peace and joy if only we can surrender our attachment to thinking we have a better idea of how to get it....