



The Wisdom Of Uncertainty, by Jack Kornfield

One day Ajahn Chah held up a beautiful Chinese tea cup, “To me this

cup is already broken. Because I know its fate, I can enjoy it fully here and now. And when it’s gone, it’s gone.” When we understand the truth of uncertainty and relax, we become free.

The broken cup helps us see beyond our illusion of control. When we commit ourselves to raising a child, building a business, creating a work of art, or righting an injustice, some measure of failure as well as success will be ours. This is a fierce teaching. Margaret is an aid worker whose clinic in Kosovo was burned to the ground, yet she began again. She knows that her work is helping people through success and failure. Emilee, who lost her most promising math student to a gang shooting, was broken-hearted. But she doesn’t regret having tutored him and now she is tutoring several others in his honor.

We may lose our best piece of pottery in the firing, the charter school we work so hard to create may fold, our start up business may go under, our children may develop problems beyond our control. If we only focus on the results, we will be devastated. But if we know the cup is broken, we can give our best to the process, create what we can and trust the larger process of life itself. We can plan, we can care for, tend and respond. But we cannot control. Instead we take a breath, and open to what is unfolding, where we are. This is a profound shift, from holding on, to letting go. As Suzuki Roshi says, “When we understand the truth of impermanence and find our composure in it, there we find ourselves in Nirvana.”

When people asked Ajahn Chah questions about enlightenment or what happens at death or whether meditation would heal their illness, or whether Buddhist teachings could be practiced equally by westerners, he would smile and say “It’s uncertain, isn’t it?”

Chögyam

Trungpa called this uncertainty “groundlessness.” With the wisdom

of uncertainty, Ajahn Chah could simply relax. Around him was an enormous sense of ease. He didn’t hold his breath or try to manipulate events. He responded to the situation at hand. When a senior western nun left the Buddhist order to become a born again Christian missionary, and then returned to the monastery to try to convert her old friends, many were upset. “How could she do this?”

Confused, they asked Ajahn Chah about her. He responded with a laugh,

“Maybe she’s right.” With these words, everyone relaxed.

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called for, Ajahn Chah could plan the construction of a great temple or oversee the network of over 100 monasteries started by his monks. When disciplining misbehaving monks, he could be decisive, demanding and stern.Â But there was a spaciousness around all these actions, as if he could turn to you a moment later and smile â€“ like a wink â€“ and say, â€œItâ€™s uncertain, isnâ€™t it?â€•Â He was living proof of the secret of life described in the Bhagavad Gita, â€œto act well without attachment to the fruits of your actions.â€•

The trust expressed by Ajahn Chah comes whenever our consciousness rests in the eternal present. â€œFrom where I sit,â€• he said, â€œnobody comes and no one goes.â€•Â â€œIn the middle way, there is no one who is strong or weak, young or old, no one who is born and no one who dies. Â This is the unconditioned. The heart is free.â€•Â The ancient Zen masters call this enlightenment â€œthe trusting mind.â€• The Zen texts explain how to do so, â€œTo live in Trusting Mind is to be without anxiety about non-perfection.â€•Â The world is â€œimperfect.â€™ Instead of struggling to perfect the world, we relax, we rest in the uncertainty. Then we can act with compassion and we give our best. Without attachment to the outcome, we bring fearlessness and trust to any circumstances.