

Hearts at Work

A Column by James Tipton

“On Loving-Kindness”



Ayya Khema, born to Jewish parents in Germany, as a teenager fled in 1938 to Scotland with two-hundred other children to escape the impending Nazi nightmare. Two years later she joined her parents in Shanghai (where her father died in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp). After the war she raised a family and studied and taught meditation.

In 1979 she was ordained a Buddhist nun (in Sri Lanka) and became highly regarded for her efforts to introduce others—particularly women—to Buddhism. She coordinated the first *International Conference of Buddhist Nuns* in the history of Buddhism (the Dalai Lama was the keynote speaker) and she was the first Buddhist nun ever to address the United Nations. Ayya Khema authored twenty-five books on Buddhism and meditation. I have been influenced by one of those books, *Being Nobody Going Nowhere: Meditations on the Buddhist Path* (1987).

With a New Year already knocking at our door it is time to “clean house.” Khema tells us that “our internal household is not in order” and that “Our external household can never run smoothly if our internal household doesn’t do so.” We allow uninvited guests—like restlessness, worry, doubt, shame, fear—into our inner household. “Being hospitable we let them all in. Then we find they have smashed the furniture, stolen the silver and broken the windows. But instead of closing the door and not letting them in again, the next day they are right back. This is our inner household, besieged by enemies. They create havoc inside so that we lack peace and harmony and wonder why.”

Buddha said it is like a young man and a young woman who dress up very elegantly to go out into the street, only to realize that they each have a carcass of a dead animal hanging around their necks. They must run back inside to clean themselves up, to get rid of those carcasses.

There are various methods to “clean ourselves up.” One is this: when an unwholesome thought arises immediately replace it with a wholesome thought. Another is meditation and study...commitment to a spiritual path. Still another “is to associate with wise and mature people, in addition to having noble friends and noble conversation.” There is no “rock-bottom security inside oneself” until “the emotions are brought under control.”

Central to Buddha’s teachings is his “Discourse on Loving-Kindness.” Of course we need to make special efforts to offer “loving-kindness” to “those people that are troublesome for us and those who don’t comply with our wishes or our expectations.”

Here are the first few lines (as presented by Ayya Khema) of Buddha’s “Discourse on Loving-Kindness,” which sets forth what we must do to become “skilled in wholesomeness” and to gain “the state of peacefulness”. Copy them and carry them with you. Tape them to a mirror. Leave them beside your bed to look at when you first wake up.

What should be done by one who's skilled in wholesomeness

To gain the state of peacefulness is this:

One must be able, upright, straight and not proud,

Easy to speak to, mild and well content,

Easily satisfied and not caught up

In too much bustle, and frugal in one's ways,

With senses calmed, intelligent, not bold,

Not being covetous when with other folk,

Abstaining from the ways that wise ones blame,

And this the thought that one should always hold:

'May all beings live happily and safe

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And may their hearts rejoice within themselves....'

Have a Happy and Wholesome New Year!