

Staying Sane in Trying Times

Kadampa Center, August 26, 2020

Every day is a very important time for us, very important every hour, minute, very important what we are going to do, what we do, how we think, it is so important to not make mistakes, always to put your effort in what is the best thing to do.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche – June 3, 2018 in Australia

Some Suggestions for How to Stay Sane

- 1) Shifting your perspective**
- 2) Using stabilizing meditation/mindfulness**
- 3) Utilizing analytical meditation**
- 4) Restoring hope and acting upon it**

Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

- Viktor E. Frankl

1) Possible shifts in perspective:

- a) Keeping a wider perspective**
- b) Holding a long-term perspective**
- c) Having a perspective beyond oneself
to include others**
- d) Seeing human nature as basically good**
- e) Maintaining a positive attitude**

a) Keeping a wider perspective

With a wider perspective, we can see our situation and all those involved in a larger context and from a more neutral position. By seeing the many conditions and circumstances that have led to this event, we can recognize that our limited perspective is not the truth.

b) Holding a long-term perspective

This means to not be solely focused on the short-term and immediate experience but to see how in time things can change in many ways. This allows us to see that even though our situation may seem challenging now, from the vantage point of a month or a year or a decade these challenges will seem much more manageable.

c) Having a perspective beyond oneself to include others

Here we shift from an individualistic point of view where only our own needs are considered to a more collective one in which the needs of others are taken into account. Self-centeredness is our default perspective but we also have the ability to take on the perspectives of others.

d) Seeing human nature as basically good

In Buddhism we speak of buddha nature, which teaches that the fundamental nature of human beings is good, and that it is only due to distorted states of mind that beings are blind to that reality. We can learn to trust in that fundamental goodness and relate to others from within that understanding.

e) Maintaining a positive attitude

Having a positive attitude can develop from remembering that our situation is workable and can quite possibly change for the better. But even if the situation does not improve, we can still hold the positive thought that this is an experience from which we can learn and grow.

Some Suggestions for How to Stay Sane

- 1) Shifting your perspective**
- 2) Using stabilizing meditation/mindfulness**
- 3) Utilizing analytical meditation**
- 4) Restoring hope and acting upon it**

Some Suggestions for How to Stay Sane

- 1) Shifting your perspective**
- 2) Using stabilizing meditation/mindfulness**
- 3) Utilizing analytical meditation**
- 4) Restoring hope and acting upon it**

3) Some relevant topics for analytical meditation:

- a) Taking refuge**
- b) Seeing the nature of cyclic existence**
- c) Generating renunciation**
- d) Training in compassion**
- e) Cherishing others and cultivating bodhichitta**

Some Suggestions for How to Stay Sane

- 1) Shifting your perspective**
- 2) Using stabilizing meditation/mindfulness**
- 3) Utilizing analytical meditation**
- 4) Restoring hope and acting upon it**

In their book, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy*, Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone discuss their view of hope.

Whatever situation we face, we can choose our response. When facing overwhelming challenges, we might feel that our actions don't count for much. Yet, the kind of responses we make, and the degree to which we believe they count, are shaped by the way we think and feel about hope.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.2
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

The word hope has two different meanings. The first involves hopefulness, where our preferred outcome seems reasonably likely to happen. If we require this kind of hope before we commit ourselves to an action, our response gets blocked in areas where we don't rate our chances too high.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.3
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

The second meaning is about desire. ... It is this kind of hope that starts our journey – knowing what we hope for and what we'd like, or love, to take place. It is what we do with this hope that really makes the difference.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.3
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

Passive hope is about waiting for external agencies to bring about what we desire. Active Hope is about becoming active participants in bringing about what we hope for.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.3
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

Active Hope is a practice. Like tai chi or gardening, it is something we do rather than have. It is a process we can apply to any situation, and it involves three steps.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.3
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

First, we take a clear view of reality; second, we identify what we hope for in terms of the direction we'd like things to move in or the values we'd like to see expressed; and third, we take steps to move ourselves or our situation in that direction.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.3
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

Since Active Hope doesn't require our optimism, we can apply it even in areas where we feel hopeless. The guiding impetus is intention: we choose what we aim to bring about, act for, or express.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.3
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

Rather than weighing our chances and proceeding only when we feel hopeful, we focus on our intention and let it be our guide.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.3
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

Future generations will look back at the time we are living in now. The kind of future they look from, and the story they tell about our period, will be shaped by choices we make in our lifetimes.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.33
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

The most telling choice of all may well be the story we live from and see ourselves participating in. It sets the context of our lives in a way that influences all other decisions.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.33
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

In *Active Hope*, Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone discuss three stories of our time that are essentially three choices:

- 1) Business as Usual**
- 2) The Great Unraveling**
- 3) The Great Turning**

In choosing our story, we not only cast our vote of influence over the kind of world future generations inherit, but we also affect our own lives in the here and now. When we find a good story and fully give ourselves to it, that story can act through us, breathing new life into everything we do.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.33
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

When we move in a direction that touches our heart, we add to the momentum of deeper purpose that makes us feel more alive.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.33
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

A great story and a satisfying life share a vital element: a compelling plot that moves toward meaningful goals, where what is at stake is far larger than our personal gains and losses. The Great Turning is such a story.

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy, p.33
Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

Some final thoughts...

So please, stop and look deeply, and let's work together in not building a contentious future, but a generative one. And let's not pretend we know, but be open and learn; let's bear witness to what is happening in our country, in our world, and take wise, compassionate, and courageous responsibility.

-Roshi Joan Halifax, Upaya Zen Center

Lion's Roar Newsletter - November 11, 2016