

The Teaching on Non-attachment

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A few months ago two of my loved ones developed life-threatening medical issues. One died within two weeks, and the other is currently undergoing treatments for pancreatic cancer. These developments were a big shock to me, and a great deal of grief welled up. Yet, even in the midst of my shock and grief, my meditation and daily training really helped me to find that deeper place of the Eternal with Its stillness, peace, and love.

As I experienced both grief *and* stillness and acceptance, I began to reflect on the teaching of *non-attachment* and how true and helpful it is. The teaching covers *all* attachments—material and emotional—such that when we allow ourselves to go strongly with them they lead to craving, grasping, and clinging which always result in suffering. However, working on letting go of attachments does not actually mean avoiding or numbing our experiences; rather, it means being present to, and accepting of, our thoughts and feelings while understanding their inherent impermanence. Feelings naturally arise, how we respond is very important.

The influence that my attachments had on me really became apparent when I began training as a monk. Attachments to things and experiences are often indulged impulsively, in a “knee-jerk” kind of way, without really thinking of their consequences. Moreover, we naturally gravitate to friends who share our attachments and help us act on them. Monastic training definitely curbed my ability to act on my habitual attachments. When my usual desires for pleasing foods and entertainments and idle conversation reared up, there was no outlet for them and no one to call to pursue them with me. This created a powerful and painful tension in myself.

The only recourse I had in this difficult time of agitation and dis-ease was to turn to my meditation. The monastic emphasis on Preceptual training was also very helpful, as the Precepts are fundamentally prescriptions for non-attachment in critical aspects of life. Both meditation and the Precepts helped loosen the tight grip my attachments had on me, which created space for the love and compassion of the Eternal to flow through them and diminish their power over me. Training gave me some distance from them so that I was able to see how over-indulgence in them actually caused me suffering. Enjoying good food and wholesome entertainments is not a problem in itself, but obsessing about them and taking refuge in them definitely is. And that is what we tend to do without a foundation of meditation and Precepts; with them, we live a more balanced and peaceful life.

Years later I had a powerful lesson about how over-attachment to loved ones causes suffering. This came up when my beloved kitty, Maxi, died in my arms. The grief I experienced was very strong and very painful. Sitting with my grief in meditation helped me realize that I was clinging to my feelings for him. In a sense, I was *indulging* the grief and blocking the natural flow of the Eternal's love and compassion to wash through the grief.

The experience with Maxi came back to me as I was confronted with the loss of one loved one and the serious prognosis for another. I knew that I had to accept the reality of the situation just as it is—*deeply* accept it. The grief is still there, still experienced...*and* the experience of this grief does not stand against the process of letting go of my emotional attachments to them. The attachments are released, *and* the love remains—brighter and with purer clarity for not being obscured by dark clouds of emotional clinging.



Simplicity

Geoff Nisbet

Blind to the Lord, we thrash around with endless theories and cleverness
In the desperate bid to find that which we sense is lacking,
And yet all the while that which we seek is right here with us.
Our lives, right now, are full to overflowing with the Lord's presence,
All things, anywhere, in any realm, are full to overflowing with the Lord's
presence,
And in one simple moment of silence this wonder can be revealed.