

## **The Practice of Generosity Begins With a Thought**

By Swamis Heidi Lindemann & Michael Perry

### Vernal Equinox

As we walked out our front door this morning we were greeted by a new world the color of rose-quartz. It is cherry blossom season in Washington, DC. The tree just outside our front door was fecund in its state of full-bloom. Just last night the tree barely showed signs of blossoming, and there had been a cold rain which discouraged everyone a bit—Spring still wasn't here. But that rain and cold yielded a gift this morning, the blossoms had arrived. Every year the cherry blossoms selflessly offer their beauty and then silently slip away. From this we are reminded that Time can come as a friend to change our world into something new and wondrous—seemingly overnight. And in about ten days, when all the blossoms will have fallen without leaving so much as a trace to testify to their former presence, Time will have come as a friend again reminding us that all is fleeting and that we should enjoy every moment while we have it, no matter what that moment brings. But this year the cherry blossoms brought with them a third gift of Time: the feeling of interconnectedness beings all over the planet. As we contemplate the gift given to us by our Japanese brothers and sisters 99 years ago, we are reminded of the suffering and loss that is being experienced across Japan right now. Thinking upon that, our minds turn to countries all over the world in revolution, and to the losses and victories of the people there, not to mention the revolutions fomenting amongst our brothers and sisters (in this case

literally) in Wisconsin and other regions of the United States. We become aware of the pain and suffering of living beings all over the planet.

There is a tendency when faced with such things, to feel helpless. If circumstances don't allow you to offer service with the sweat of your brow, offer beneficent thoughts and acts of generosity to those immediately around you. As we think on these things, we offer an ancient prayer which translates:

*May all beings have auspiciousness;*

*May all being have peace;*

*May all beings have fullness;*

*May all beings have fortune;*

*May all live in sweetness;*

*May all live in luminosity, free of sickness;*

***May all see the goodness of the world with their own eyes;***

*May consciousness be free of suffering.*

When we travel around the world to teach, we meet many people in pain. Here are some of the things that weigh on them: they are hurting because of the death of a longtime friend, a spouse or a parent—sometimes a child; they are suffering from health problems; they cannot get past a divorce or break-up; they cannot get unstuck from creative rut so that they can find a job, or change jobs; they have reached a seemingly insurmountable obstacle in rearing their children; they worry that life is changing too fast and they are about to lose their world.

These are just a few examples of the common concerns we hear from the mouths of people who generously share their life's stories with us. What is the lesson to be learned? A wise man once said:

To have a friend in need is sweet, and to share happiness, and to be a light. And to have done some good before leaving this world is sweet. And to go beyond suffering....

This sage expression embodies the three lessons of time given to us each year by the cherry blossoms:

1. That your world can take a sweet and unexpected turn suddenly, and because of the smallest gesture of kindness;
2. That all that is in your world, both the pleasure and the pain, is temporary. Even if you do nothing by effort or will, time will change things—joyful effort just makes your journey richer and more easeful;
3. That we are interconnected, and in this way we are blessed when we can be an answer to someone's need; likewise we are blessed when we have a need so that someone else can share their light with us.

Here is a simple meditation to make you more aware of these important lessons:

- Visualize yourself as an enlightened wise being who is spiritually, mentally and physically strong, wealthy and wise.
- See in front of you a round, golden table. On this table see:
  - a letter "A" written in a language of your choice, symbolizing expression and poetry
  - the most wisdom-filled book you can conceive of (maybe you will write it one day)

- gold for spiritual and material abundance to be of service to other beings
- food and water without limit for the nourishment of all beings
- a candle for awakening the inner Light
- Offer these gifts to your beloved, to those dearest to you, to your enemies and to those towards whom you are indifferent.
- See that no matter how much you give, more is still coming.
- In your own words, or the words of a mantra or prayer dear to you, wish peace and well being to all beings.

We do explicitly mean to include “enemies”. Wise men and women across the ages, have said that the world does not change, because we only offer blessings to those we love. If we want it to change, we must bless our enemies as well as our loved ones.

This is a simple meditation you can do upon waking or before going into sleep, or both. Some people find it useful to do it while laying down, bringing these sweet thoughts into sleep with them.

As you go through your day, remember that this meditation is more than a concentrated visualization. It is a reminder that we are connected to the world we live in, and to all of Life. Life calls and when we answer even one of its smaller calls, we immediately get out of our own problems and understand that if we are capable of blessing another, we are also capable of blessing ourselves. The way beyond suffering is within you. By practicing generosity mentally, emotionally, and actually you will begin to find that way. Be like the cherry blossoms and do some good before you leave this planet.