

Happy New Years everyone and welcome to the Tibet Center - Kung-chab Tar Du Ling. A Buddhist meditation and study center located in NYC and Northern NJ - thats Tuesdays in NYC and Wed in NJ. This is our twice weekly presentation of the Buddha Dharma, specifically this is a talk series entitled "Dharamsala through the eyes of a Western Nun". All the prayers we say are on the website, under the FAQ sections, scroll down to prayers. If there is a problem with the sound or anything else, please let Darren or Tony know. If there is anyone who you wish us to prayer for please put their names in the chat box.

Thank you for joining. For those of you who don't know me from my visit in the summer, my name is Tenzin Karuna. This name was given to me by Jhado Rinpoche. Jhado Rinpoche is the 6th incarnation of Jhado monastery quite close to Lhasa in Tibet. He fled to India and later became the Abott of HHDL temple, Namgyal monastery in Dharamsala. He travels a lot throughout the world but lives still in Namgyal close to where he ordained me.

My first name is Tenzin because all monks and nuns are given the first name of the person who ordains them. Jhado Rinpoche was initially ordained by HHDL whose first name is Tenzin, so his first name became Tenzin, as did mine. You might have been on HHDL website, pictures of numerous ordination ceremonies, so all of those people have the first name Tenzin. I think you can imagine how many Tenzins there are in Dharamsala. We even have a Tenzin among our flock here. Long story a bit shorter, I like many nuns go by my second name Karuna.

I was ordained a couple of years ago so covid was still on everyones mind. When he announced my name in the ceremony, my first thought was "oh no that sounds like corona." Of course I quickly came around as Karuna is Sanskrit for compassion, which is one of the most important ideas in tibetan Buddhism, that and wisdom (prajna in sanskrit). Its actually an unusual name as the names are usually Tibetan and this is sanskrit. Its not always easy to do but I try and live up to this name.

Sometimes I find Jackie, my previous name to be much easier to live up to as it doesn't mean anything. At least I don't think it does. So you can also call me Jackie.

There is also a generic term for nun in Tibetan, "Ani" which is the equavelent to sister referring to a Christian nun, but Ani means aunt. Most add the term La to the end, which makes it Ani-la. This is a great name for someone like me who is bad with names, as you can just say Ani-la to the nun sitting in front of you and you are too embarrassed to ask her name for the 3rd time.

For those of you who are also bad at names, you can also call me "hay you" . I totally understand. Its funny since I have been here, you get those people on the street who try and sell you something and 2 of them have called me the "lady in red". To be honest I would prefer "Hay you".

+

I am here visiting from Dharamsala where I go to school until February 22. At that point I am going to a pilgrimage of the great Buddhist sites in india then back to a new school year. Tony and Khensur Rinpoche Nicky have kindly given me the chance to talk with you during my stay. I love the dharma and look forward to sharings some of that love with you.

I want to apologize for my hippy like appearance. I love saying that when my hair is long. When I became a nun I was told not to let me hair grow more that the width of 2 fingers held together. I am now of 1.5 fingers, so I am pretty close. To be honest I keep my hair on the longer side as it freaks out my parents less. They are happy about me being a nun, but the hair still bugs them a bit. And your parents are very important in your life, so what the hay. You actually can't become ordained without

your parents approval. I was very lucky, being an only child, that my parents were open and loving enough to agree, wanting me to be happy and all.

My parents were lucky enough to have met Rinpoche when I used to attend classes on lower Broadway. My Mum read his book and my Dad was so taken with him, he has his picture up. I met Rinpoche, the founder of this center Kyongla Rato Rinpoche and attended classes in the early thru late 90s. At that time I had graduated mathematics from Barnard College and had a good financial job which paid for my masters in applied Mathematics at Courant institute at NYU.

But now lets have a break from me and put the spotlight on you. I want to first thank you for being here, physically and remotely. I think its important that you take some time to thank yourselves, you could be doing a multitude of other mundane tasks, but instead you are here wanting to work towards becoming happier individuals, improve your lives and the world around you, make your present and future circumstances easier, to lessen lifes inevitable punches and be open to a world of beauty and meaning , in other words to become more enlightened individuals.

All I can say is well done you! Its an extremely commendable goal. Most people have sadly given up, thrown in the towel and settle for a life of discontentment. Never being able to relieve their inner discomfort or quieten that restless force inside which believes the answer lies in the worlds plethora (what a great word) of external things, never being able to relieve that unending itch that we all have of never really being content. Maybe for a few minutes here and there but not for long.

Thank goodness you know better. You have woken up from that vicious cycle, knowing that external things don't quite cut it in the long run. Bravely looking for answers elsewhere, from within. Why brave? Here in the West, looking within for answers for a happier more contented life is very new, very innovative. We've had thousands of years ingrained in us to focus on the outside world and not our inside world, our mind. You are going against the flow of mainstream Western culture, in other worlds you are trailblazers. And for those of you lucky enough to be born in a Buddhist country or be brought up in a Buddhist family, where faith and reliance on the Dharma runs a lot deeper, its I am sure very difficult to walk the line between the two cultures. Very few have done this before, yet you bravely stay true to your Buddhist heritage, in the midst of all this hedonism.

So good job everyone. Take a minute to give yourself credit and support, a much earned pat on the back. Out in the big world of samsara, sometimes don't find or feel a whole bunch of support. Many seem to want to knock you down. To counter this, its important to have good self-esteem.

*That fence sitter in me wants to put forth the reminder that although other people do things that seem to know you down, we can't blame them either. It is not their responsibility, its those pesky poisonous afflictions such as selfish competition, pride, aggression run wild.*

For a long time my self-esteem was so low I could barely take a compliment let alone rejoice or pat myself on the back. If someone at work said - oh you did a great job with that project, I would have said something negative about it, instead of just acknowledging the compliment and admitting I had done a good job. I even did this with my sewing hobby. I just loved different fabrics, elaborately designed fabrics, and made skirts out of them. If someone admired my skirt, I would point out the smallest flaw that no one would ever notice. I didn't need anyone to stab me in the back as I was already doing it to myself. But I had no idea, I was actually oblivious to all of this. It just goes to show how hard it is to judge from within. It wasn't until Another woman at work pointed out my inability to take compliments because she had the same issue. So when we gave eachother compliments we

would make a face if the other didn't just say thank you. Once I finally came to terms with how silly my behavior was I put effort into fixing this by improving my self-esteem. Its not like I could say ok tomorrow at 2pm I will no longer have bad self-esteem. It was a gradual process and rejoicing really helped. Its very important to rejoice in you, in your accomplishments, in your failures, in your tenacity, in you.

I was recently on a Bodhicitta retreat with Geshe Damdul in Dharamsala and he pointed out that feeling joy is what connects us to things. By allowing ourselves to feel joy we are creating a stronger connection to what is beneficial in ourselves and making it stronger. A huge part of buddhism is about knowing what to keep in yourself, what to adopt, what to discard, what to strengthen and what to lessen. We need to keep and strengthen our love and respect for the Dharma. So rejoice in your decision to be here now. Rejoice in your goal to become truly contented and happy individuals, to become enlightened for the sake of all. What better goal is there? We need to give this goal great respect and we need to give ourselves even more respect for having it.

We thought it was good to start with a more casual talk series, which I titled Dharamasala through the eyes of a Western nun. But First I want to share how my journey began.

Before I met Rinpoche I was a shy person with low self-esteem and had been depressed for several years. I finally couldn't hold that stiff upper lip anymore and Like many others I started searching for more meaning in life, for a happier life. At this point I didn't really have faith in anything. I didn't even have faith that I would ever be happy. I was depressed and along with that came the thought that there was no way out of my overall misery, no way out of life's discontentment. I was just hoping there was a bandaid solution, a quick fix that would magically and quickly grow into happiness.

I tried many things - yoga, Taoism, tai Chi, new age practices, quantum mechanics classes, retreats at Ashrams. Then after about a year of searching I walked into the center on lower Broadway and met Rinpoche. That was it - My search had ended and my path began. But I still didn't have real faith. I just hoped that Rinpoche would be able to guide me to happiness. I assumed it would be a path like the yellow brick road in the Wizard of Oz, all nicely laid out, with lots of singing and dancing along the way. For those of you who don't know the wizard of oz, its a story about a girl Dorothy who gets swept away by a tornado and is taken to the magical land of Oz and meets Scarecrow, a Lion and a man made of tin - Tin Man. There lives a great wizard who has promised to grant their wishes if they defeat the wicked witch of the north, which they do. They go back to the wizard so they can have their wishes granted via a lovely yellow brick road where Tony has kindly laid out nice snack tables along the way. Dorothy hopes to return to Kansas, the Tin Man desires a heart, the Lion, courage and the Scarecrow, brains. In the end they are all given something that makes them feel they have gotten their wish - the tin man a clock, lion medals and the scarecrow a certificate but really these qualities were there inside them but they didn't acknowledge them. I assumed inner growth would be like that, taking the yellow brick path and be given what I needed. I glossed over the unfun, and difficult part. The part that didn't include snacks, defeating the wicked witch (aka our afflictions).

Inner growth isn't always easy. Some have a more difficult time with it than others and it seems like a battle. Raise your hands (and your virtual hands) if it feels like a battle sometimes. Each of us have our own personal battles that we need to fight. The problem is its very difficult to comprehend what we need to discard and adopt from the inside. Its hard for us to judge, to see our own issues. This is just human nature. Thats why editors in the publishing world are needed as writers find it hard to notice

their mistakes. I used to be a quality assurance analyst for developers in the financial world. Its very hard for developers to find mistakes in their programs. You need an outsiders point of view to find them. I would find an issue, tell the developer, they would fix it and I would retest it. Wow what a simple process. Too bad this can't be done when it comes to working on very personal items, like how we behave. If I told the developer you aren't a very nice person, please fix that. They would tell me to go and... well you get the idea. Change has to come from within us. We have to think its a good idea or the right thing to do. Even if the person's boss told them the same thing, they might try and be nice for awhile but it wouldn't last, as they person needs to be true to themselves. Even if their idol, the person in the world they thought beyond highly of told them the same thing, it still wouldn't last in the long run, much like how blind faith works, or doesn't work.

Thats where good teachers like Khyongla Rinpoche come in with their skilful means. First they know what you need to work on - what you as an individual need to remove and adopt in order to become a really happy and contented person. Of course they aren't just going to blurt it out but they use some magic Rinpoche dust which helps us figure it out for ourselves. They can work in very subtle ways, acting like a mirror so you can see yourself. They also understand your predisposition, how much you can handle at what time. If they see you would completely fall apart if you thought you weren't a nice person, they would work on something smaller, like how you aren't nice to quality assurance analysts, then they would build on it, gradually. For others they might push a little harder, give you more to chew. They give you what you need at the appropriate time. All of this is just so incredibly nice of them. They could be off happily playing golf or getting their nails done but instead they work tirelessly to help us find happiness for ourselves.

Anyway Rinpoche, through his not always subtle skilful means, helped me realize what Alan Wallace in his *The Seven-Point Mind Training* mentions - that before you really delve into Buddhism, you need to get your mental house in order. I won't bore you with details, but Lets just say the process was not pretty but I blindly followed it through. The problem is in doing so my ego took a beating, which is fine if you are a highly realized practitioner, but I was not. When it was all over, The only way I was able to recover some self-confidence and dignity was blaming something besides myself for all my emotional upheaval. So to create some self-esteem, I blamed Buddhism and left it totally. Instead I tried to make a go of Samsara - I bet you can guess how that ended. Its a shame that at that time, I didn't have actual faith in the Dharma otherwise I would have stayed after my mental deep clean.

On the plus side I was now clear minded, With a good mental well-being thanks to Rinpoche and the Dharma he taught, so I made the most of samsara and got good jobs, nice car, house in the pretty country side of Garrison NY with a pretty garden which gave me lots to do and kept myself busy. All this time, I never forgot about Rinpoche and the center and would check in remotely from time to time. I even had a dream about him. He was gardening by the side of a road, tilling the land, getting it ready for planting some shrubs. I was in a nice car with a friend and was so happy. I yelled out to say hello/good bye. He stopped to wave and then continued his gardening.

Being a very tenacious individual (I am a capricorn you know), I stayed in Samsara for quite sometime, hoping I would Eventually find real happiness and not just temporary, superficial happiness. I bet you can guess if I found it or not. Finally I called it a day. I never found that friend that made me 100% happy, I never found a job that brought me 100% contentment, I was running out of home improvement projects that kept me so busy and focused I didn't have time to think if I was happy.

Eventually I decided to peek into the Dharma But I was far too embarrassed to go back to Rinpoche, after all he was my mirror and pointed out my dirty laundry. So I went to another Dharma center in CT under Khensur Rinpoche Lobsang Jampa.

That's where I gained admiration for and devotion to the Dharma, what they call inspiring faith. Some call it the spark of inspiration which is the basis for deeper faith. For me it wasn't so much a spark as it was a volcano eruption. I was ready, I couldn't get enough. I was like falling in love, I wanted more and more. I didn't like being far away from it for long. If I wasn't thinking about the Dharma for more than 30 minutes, I felt weird and got a bit sad. But it wasn't like that creepy needy falling in love, it was more like the feeling of coming home after a very long and tiring journey. I didn't regret my stay in samsara, I had learned a ton, but I was so hungry for Dharma knowledge. I immersed myself in the Dharma, really engaged with it. It gelled with every fiber of my being. I read and learned so much. I had another short dream about Khyongla Rinpoche. In it someone said to me that Khyongla gained enlightenment through Mahamudra practice. So the next day I madly went searching for Mahamudra classes and found one at a center in DC which was run by an former Abbot of Sera Mey Khensur Rinpoche Lobsang Tharchin but was now being run by a Western teacher Wilson Hurley, while his incarnation gets a bit older. Anyway I studied and read all I could. Attended as many classes as I could.

Then I was in class with Rinpoche Lobsang Jampa. He was teaching the second chapter of Dharmakirti's Pramanavarttika, a book on logic and epistemology that works to prove many Buddhist concepts including how Buddha is a reliable guide. He was on the section talking about the four noble truths and how there is a door out, a way out of our suffering. I could barely hold back the tears. I finally believed there was a way out and that I could be actually happy. I had always been a glass half empty person although you would never have guessed. For many years I was actually a closet case pessimist. As I felt I lacked encouragement and blamed that for my negativity and pessimism, I always tried hard to encourage others in all aspects of their life. All the while, not believing happiness was possible for myself. But that all started to change. My aspirational faith had started to bloom. I was eager and full-on.

From then on I treated everything like advice and applied it to my life. Geshe Lhakdor at the LTWA where I go to school, mentions that many people approach Buddhist teachings like going to a restaurant - they first decide to go to a nice restaurant, then go and order the delicious food, but don't eat it when it arrives, meaning they don't apply it to their lives. Well that is just silly!

I went to a teaching on how jealousy negatively disturbs your mind and that we should put effort into removing it. The teacher mentioned how generating sympathetic joy towards others is an antidote to jealousy, meaning it counteracts it. So first I needed to decide jealousy is something bad, a feeling I wanted to have less of. I couldn't just do it because the teacher said to, I had to believe it myself. My first question was does being jealous disturb my mind? Do I feel unease and uncomfortable when I am jealous? Yes. Does it create a nice feeling inside, something I want more of? No. Is it something that gets me out of bed in the morning - Oh boy I can't wait to be jealous of someone today - NO. Would I ever say I had a great day today as I became jealous - NO. So I came to the conclusion that Jealousy felt yucky and wasn't something I wanted. Before my faith in Dharma had started to grow, I would have stopped it there with that thought that "jealousy is a part of human nature and therefore can't change that." But I no longer felt that way. My newfound optimism allowed me to move forward. So I tried to be happy for the person I was jealous of - whether they got a great job, a fancy apartment, a

posh car, a wonderful loving partner. A Good for them kind of thing. They did something wonderful in the past and this is their reward. "Go team sentient beings." At first I still felt jealous and still do but just reminding myself that jealousy isn't something I wanted. I don't want to be feeling this way and I won't feel this way if I am happy for them. It was my choice. If I really didn't want this feeling of jealousy and found it hard to generate sympathetic joy, I would pretend it was instead my long lost best friend that had the fancy apartment. I also tried meditating by imagining scenarios where I was able to get over my jealousy by generating joy for the other person. You might think this is a bunch of who-eee but Neuroscience has shown that we use the same neural pathways when we imagine something as we do when we actually do it. The power of visualization which is extremely popular with all types of athletes. Many athletes including 70-90% of Olympians do this after a study done in 1970. So when I was in a situation that made me jealous, I was more confident that I could turn it around because I had imagined turning it around by applying the antidote. I also tried skipping forward mentally in time - thinking about how happy and confident I would be if I didn't really grasp and hold onto the jealousy. I might feel it for a minute but quickly let it go, allowing myself to feel joy. And who doesn't want to feel joy! There were just so many options available. It was up to me to choose. My meal had been served and it's up to me to eat.

There were times it wasn't easy - I might have been in a bad mood, so I reminded myself of my new found faith and kept at it. With faith I knew things would improve, that over time, if I kept applying antidotes I would get less jealous and if I did it would just be momentary. I had faith it would work, I just had to do it and keep doing it. It's really important to keep at it, make it your hobby. If you fend off jealousy once or even if you feel it but not so deeply and not for as long - rejoice! In fact that's cause for celebration. But keep at it. Then you will get to spend more time rejoicing which is a fun thing to do. Yippee for me and the Dharma. I am sure all of you have something to rejoice over. A moment that you held your tongue as you might have hurt someone's feelings, rescuing the spider from your pet's water bowl, saying a prayer with fewer mental wanderings. Yippee for you and the Dharma. It's great that we can also rejoice in others' good deeds. I was tickled pink when I heard that rejoicing in someone else's good deeds is also helpful. So I can be happy for you. We better stop here otherwise we will get in an endless loop of rejoicing.

The teachers at the center there were happy with my enthusiasm, I always asked questions and was very attentive but sometimes got tired because I felt so indebted to Khyongla Rinpoche I couldn't stop thinking or mentioning it. I felt so lucky that I was now really ready to start my Dharma path. All that emotional upheaval and time in samsara was so worth it, as it led up to knowing deep down that the Dharma is really a jewel.

That winter in 2019 I joined a pilgrimage run by Namgyal monastery in Ithaca to go to Mundgod for the 600th anniversary of Je Tsongkhapa's parinirvana. HHDL would be teaching and the group would get to meet him. I realized I would get a chance to finally see Khyongla Rinpoche to thank him for all he did. I nearly collapsed when I saw him. Two monks had to hold me up. I didn't get to spend much time with him but I felt he was proud of me for returning to Buddhism and fine with the path I was on. I laughed when I realized I had really gone on that trip to see him and get his approval. And I left feeling a great relief.

My faith then grew into Trusting faith - true conviction. I was ready to lay everything on the line, hold nothing back, immerse myself as much as possible in the Dharma. At this point I preferred to be reading, listening or contemplating the Dharma than my numerous home decoration projects. Anyway

I had painted, stenciled, decopagued most walls in my house. I more or less stopped watching TV for the same reason. I worked long hours and got home late. I didn't want to waste the 2 hours I had. I started to not enjoy gardening as much, mostly because of the bugs. When I dug a hole to plant a new rose bush or something, I would inevitably kills some bugs and would feel bad. My parents bought me lots of beautiful shrubs and flower plants, like clematis, hydrangeas, peonies and I hated seeing them being eaten by bugs but I didn't want to use insecticide. Gardening had become stressful and no longer fun. I started to consider selling my house and moving closer to the center. I was on the fence about it for sometime and then a former abbot of sera mey and Gyuto tantric college gave us teachings on the Heart Sutra. He mentioned to me that a deciding factor would appear soon. Low and behold 2 days later, a repair man was in the basement checking my huge and complex water filtration system, Garrison is on well water so it needs to be filtered. A snake about 5-6 feet long was wrapped around the top, it freaked him out as it would me. He ran out with water spraying on the electrical box for the house. I was lucky my house didn't blow up. Later that day I put my house on the market.

I got a sublet in a condo in a cute small town called Bethel CT which was close to the center. It even had a nice diner with sidewalk seating called Jacquelines. It felt like I was in heaven which was weird as covid had hit. I felt so carefree being a renter. There was nothing to fix. I didn't have to worry about things falling apart in the future. I couldn't really decorate. There was no garden I had to worry about. The condo took care of that and the mowing as well as the snow removal. Plus I wasn't so tied to my car. Over the years in the hilly country with no sidewalks, I missed walking like one does in NYC. Plus In Garrison everything was a 20 minute drive away. Here I could walk to the grocery store and the local pizza joint.

Of course like most of us, during the pandemic I took lots of Zoom dharma classes. I re-met Geshe Lhakdor, the director of the LTWA where I go to school. He did a wonderful class on Atisha's Garland of Gems. I had met him when I went to the south of india and visited Rinpoche. As he likes to remind me often, he and Rinpoche were friends.

I was very happy with my new no commuting, carefree life. For a short time I thought I had found true happiness or at least as close to it as one gets. Then it dawned on me, I was just feeling the effects of the Suffering of Change. It wasn't real happiness and it definitely was not going to last. I had been a home owner for over 10 years. Neither home was new and they both needed a lot of work. I had gotten sucked up in tending to them as well as their gardens. Yes it was fun for awhile, but not always. And definitely always draining. Now that was gone and I felt better but it was just a reaction. Soon that reaction would wear thin and my happiness created by my new carefree life would fade. It was like a teaching on emptiness of inherent existence. Walking to the grocery store in itself would not make me happy. It was only because I was not able to for many years that it made me happy. If walking to the gracery store was inherently existent, then it would make me happy all the time.

I started to have really bad dreams. Thats one of my issues, I put too much stock in my dreams. So much so that when teachers compare life to be like a dream, I don't get it. I make them very solid by adding meaning to them. Luckily they compare it to 9 other things which comprise the 10 similies. All phenonemon are like the reflection of the moon in a still pond, a mirage, a magical illusion, empty space, a shadow, an image in a mirror, an echo and a couple of more that I don't understand - like the city of the Gandharvas and like a supernatural transformation. I have also heard a flash of lightening being in the list.

But back to my bad dreams which included nearly drowning, having my teeth bashed in, and a crow taking one of my eye balls (sorry for those for that last unPG one). They scared me but they lead me to think about the preciousness of our lives, of this precious human rebirth. Or put another way, without emphasis on past and future lives - life is short.

Since my carefree condo stay, my Dharma practice had stagnated. For a couple of months I had stopped putting effort into moving forward. Before I would have been sad if I ended the day not having grown in the Dharma. But now I was just riding on my previous coat tails. I felt fine doing this as work but not with the Dharma. It was too important to me. I didn't want to feel regret later for not making the most of my time. Regret I think is a very sad emotion. Even before becoming a Buddhist, it always made me feel sad if someone really regretted not doing something in their life. Its one thing if you do something and it doesn't work out so you regret it, but at least you tried. But to regret not doing something is such a shame. I didn't realize that from a Buddhist perspective that regret is a hinderance. During HHDL last teachings he covered the great Nagarjuna's In praise of Dharmadatu and made a point of fixing the typo in the text, replacing desire with regret as one of the 5 obscurations to realization of clear light mind. It was Verse 19

for mind's clear light.

Five obscurations manage to obscure it:

Desire, laziness, and ill intent,

And agitation too, as well as doubt.

So to hell with regret, I decided to take it up a notch, to move my Dharma practice up on my life's priority list. Geshe Lhakdor had suggested going to school at the LTWA where he is the director. I had enough money saved that I could move to India and not work. Then I could immerse myself in Buddhism and eventually become a nun, which I had been pondering for some time.

Heard about a nunnery for Westerners called Thosamling in Dharamsala. Western nuns of any Tibetan Buddhist lineage can go there and live - Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelug (thats us). So I contacted them. Like some other centers in India, they depended completely on money from in person retreats. They didn't have anything online and most of the nuns had left India for the pandemic and couldn't return. Long story short, they needed money, so I donated and more or less carried them thru the pandemic. Now you should be saying - oh you were so generous but sadly in this case, not quite. Of course it was kind to donate but it was mixed with a selfish motive. Part of me figured if I donate money then they will let me live there and be nice to me when I arrive and help be become a nun. I hadn't given with such an ulterior motive ever. I guess because it was Dharma related, at the time I thought it was ok. Its kinda like when I was reading a sadhana, if my mind wandered to pizza I would quickly label that as bad and stop, but if my mind wandered to the 4 immeasurables it was ok and I didn't stop it. But distraction is distraction, no matter how you dress it up.

One my behalf I would like to add that it is very hard to give completely without strings or without hoping for something in return, even if just a thank you. I was brought up thats its polite to say thank you if someone gives you something or if someone does something nice for you. My parents were brought-up in middle class England and are very polite people. Nothing outrageous, just things like standing up for old and pregnant people on the subway, moving over a bit so someone else can sit down, saying bless you when someone sneezes. The problem is when you take those things too seriously and get upset with people if they don't do them. I had become the politness police and boy



did I have a hayday on my commute. Heaven forbid if someone spoke loudly in a quiet car on my commute - my death rays would come out and I would glare away. Its not that I had to unlearn the manners I was taught but needed to view them as less important. If I gave someone something and they didn't say thank you, it was hard not to feel a bit irritated. What eventually helped me was reminding myself that people are more important than manners. I didn't want to dislike someone just because they didn't say thank you.

Of course the best way to give is remembering that the 3 spheres of giving, the giver, receiver and gift are all interdependent and therefore empty of IE. Without anyone of those 3, there would be no concept of giving. Each rely on the other two to be a part of the whole idea of giving.

I had a place to live in India and a school to go to, so i decided to do it. But I wanted to do it in a responsible manner. We are all inter-related. What I do impacts my parents, friends, co-workers and my pets. You don't need religion to tell you not to be responsible, although the concepts of karma and thoughtfulness definitely help one become more responsible. Secular ethics is enough to tell you not to just act with only you in mind but to be thoughtful of others also. I knew my parents would be hit hard by my news - I'm an only child. Luckily they are very open people, being artistic types and want me to be happy. I decided to stay close to them for a few months before I left to soften the blow. I had lost my lease at the condo anyway, so no harm to me. I gave my job their required 2 months notice. And as for my dear cat, things worked out very well. My neighbor at the condo agreed to take her. As I had lost my lease she let me stay for a few weeks with my cat so she could get used to her new home and new cat sister. I also left her money incase of medical expenses. I donated most of my things but have a few boxes in my parents basement. And off I went to become a happy renounciate.