

FS November News: Holiday 2020 Edition

Season's Greetings, Donors and Subscribers!

Here we are already! Finally bringing this very memorable and challenging year to a close.

Many thanks to you all for building community with me here. I'm so grateful that we are all connected. It is crucial this year to feel our interdependence - our humanity - whenever and however we can.

I'm sending a huge THANK YOU to our donors for making it possible for:

+ the newsletter to go out to more than 4500 readers every month (an increase of 1900+ since January)

+ more than 200 informational flyers packs to be printed and mailed each month

+ and for the website and the software to remain free and accessible to everyone always!

I could not do this without YOU, donors!

Finally, thank you to all the readers who, for nearly two months, have been sending in book recommendations. You did a great job of meeting the strict guidelines ~ :)

HOLIDAY PAIN RELIEVER

Ready or not, here they come! The holidays can be great, and they can also be very challenging. Some lucky folks spend the month making crafts and humming christmas music, but there are plenty of us who find the season pretty stressful and maybe even depressing.

I'm often on an emotional roller coaster throughout the month of December: feeling light and happy when searching for a cookie recipe, and then I come crashing down when I remember that the credit card bill (for those presents that were so easy to buy) comes at the same time as the property tax bill. I know that I'm supposed to be extra joyful during this time of year, but I often discover that I become less patient, more anxious and my expectations increase. When I reflect on my feelings, I often find that I feel guilty because I am not feeling the 'joy of the season', which will be especially this year; with the constant threat of the COVID virus hanging over our heads. The very rational limitations, so that we can be safer, are starting to wear me down. I miss being around people.

I have heard the above sentiment in a few groups already this year, so I decided to dedicate a large portion of this newsletter to swellness: where our mental and physical health meet and support one another...for our own swellness, and for community swellness, too.

TRANSFORMING OUR SUFFERING INTO HAPPINESS By Thich Nhat Hanh - Zen Master and poet

We all try to be happy, yet we all continue to suffer. We may even think that we are "failing at happiness". But being able to enjoy happiness doesn't require that we have zero suffering; the art of happiness is also the art of suffering well. If we focus exclusively on pursuing happiness, we may regard suffering as something to be ignored or resisted. Knowing how to suffer well is essential to realizing true happiness.

One of the most difficult things for us to accept is that there is no realm where there's only happiness and no suffering. The main affliction of our modern civilization is that we don't know how to handle the suffering inside us and we try to cover it up with consumption, expectations, and blame.

When we learn to acknowledge, embrace, and understand our suffering, we transform the pain into understanding, compassion, and joy for ourselves and for others, and then we can suffer much less. Until we face our suffering, we can't be present and available to life, and happiness will continue to elude us. We can transform our pain through mindfulness.

To be mindful means to be aware. The way we start producing the medicine of mindfulness is by stopping and taking a conscious breath, giving our complete attention to our in-breath and our out-breath. When we breathe in and we know we're breathing in, that's mindfulness. When take a breath in this way, we unite body and mind and come back home to ourselves.

Maybe we have not been kind enough to our body. When we recognize our tension, pain, or stress, we can bathe it in mindful awareness, which is the beginning of healing. If we take care of the suffering inside us, we have more clarity, energy, and strength to help address the suffering of our loved ones, as well as the suffering in our community and the world. If, however, we are preoccupied with the fear, hurt, disappointment, anger and despair in us, we can't reduce our suffering.

Mindfulness is the best way to be with our suffering without being overwhelmed by it. You can recognize the presence of suffering in you and in the world and you can cradle the suffering.

The first method of creating joy and happiness is to cast off beliefs that are based in fear: fear of missing out, fear of not attaining material things, fear of not finding the relationships we wish for. These are attachments that are obstacles to our happiness.

In our consciousness there is hell, and there is also paradise. We are capable of being compassionate, understanding, and joyful. If we pay attention only to the negative things in us, especially the suffering of past hurts, we are wallowing in our sorrows and not getting positive nourishment.

Concentration has the power to break through the afflictions that make you suffer, so you can allow joy and happiness to come in. To stay in the present moment takes concentration. Worries and anxiety about the future are always there, ready to take us away. We can see them, acknowledge them, and use our concentration to return to the present moment. Concentration is always concentration on something. If you focus on your breathing in a relaxed way, you are cultivating your inner strength.

We may know that something (a craving, or a grudge) is an obstacle for our happiness, that it brings us anxiety and fear. But still we go on, spending our time and energy obsessing about it. What we need is some insight. Insight is seeing what is there. It is the clarity that can liberate us from afflictions such as jealousy or anger, and allow true happiness to come.

We can call upon feelings of strength, capability and confidence from the past to help us face or question the fear or anxiety we feel now. We can even draw from other times that we have suffered and come through challenges, only to be stronger for them. We can use it to remind ourselves, "How lucky I am to not be in that situation right now." - that is insight; and in that moment, our joy, and our happiness can grow very quickly.

The essence of our practice can be described as transforming suffering into happiness. It's not a complicated practice, but it requires us to cultivate mindfulness, concentration, and insight. It requires that we come home to ourselves, that we make peace with our suffering; treating it tenderly, and looking deeply at the roots of our pain. It requires that we let go of useless, unnecessary sufferings and take a closer look at our idea of happiness.

The art of happiness requires that we nourish ourselves daily with acknowledgment, understanding, and compassion for ourselves and for those around us. With each breath, we ease suffering and generate joy. With each step, the flower of insight blooms.

THE BOOK RECOMMENDATION LIST IS READY!

If you would like to receive a copy of the list, please **START A NEW EMAIL** with the subject: **BOOK LIST** and I will email the list to you. **THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO CONTRIBUTED!** We built this list

together; proof that our distance and other constraints do not completely prohibit our ability to collectively create.

Sue's BOOK RECOMMENDATION:

LIFE IS IN THE TRANSITIONS: MASTERING CHANGE AT ANY AGE by Bruce Feiler.

Life is the story you tell yourself, says Bruce Feiler. He discovered that transitions are happening more frequently in our lives, and mastering the skills to manage them has become more urgent. The idea that we'll have one job, one relationship, one source of happiness is hopelessly outdated. We feel unnerved by this upheaval. We're concerned that our lives are not what we expected, that we've veered off course, living life out of order. Each of us faces dozens of life 'disruptors', which could become 'life-quakes'...shake ups that lead to transformation. As the saying goes "when one door closes another one opens", Bruce Feiler provides an invaluable guide on the journey between the doors. As Herman Hesse would say, "there is magic in every beginning".

IRS / EIP INFO

I've received quite a few letters from readers asking me what I know about checks that may or may not be coming. I will restate what I said in the News Flash: "I am only a messenger. I cannot answer any questions."

QUOTES:

We become the stories we tell ourselves. - Tom Asacker

The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away! ~ Pablo Picasso

When you live gratefully and joyfully every day is a holiday. - Marty Rubin

I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way they handle these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights. - Maya Angelou

You can't fool me—there ain't no Sanity Clause! - Chico Marx

There are three stages of man: he believes in Santa Claus; he does not believe in Santa Claus; he is Santa Claus. - Bob Phillips

Many of us reflect on the past year and make plans for the next year during the month of December. This year we learned that we have to be flexible creative and ready to pivot. That we can go ahead and make plans, but we should be prepared with a Plan B if Plan A is thwarted. Now, more than ever, it's become crucial for us to keep up with our mental and physical routine to stay healthy, strong and ready for anything!

Wishing you and yours all the best in the holiday season!

Thank you to everyone who sent in Thanksgiving greetings. That was very kind of you to include me ~ :)

Stay strong, stay safe and prepare for possibility...and new relationships!
To our successful transitions. Ubuntu! ~ sue

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