

## Conversations with self-13

### ON NOT TAKING THINGS TO HEART

Once upon a time an old father and a son were escorting their donkey to a neighbouring town to buy and bring back bags of rice. As they travelled through a village on the way to their destination, they passed a few men lounging under a tree. As the pair walked past, the men started laughing at the two of them commenting on how foolish they were to lead a donkey and not ride on it. Both father and son were filled with remorse and the son urged his father to mount the donkey while he led them. As they passed another village en route, they encountered some more people who again began laughing at them. The villagers commented on how heartless the father was to make the young boy lead both him and the donkey. The father got down and recommended that his son ride on the donkey. They continued their journey and while passing through the next small town met a few old people who cursed the boy for allowing his elderly father to walk. No sooner did the father and son hear this than they both decided to ride together on the donkey. Passing another town they saw a group of men who chastised the couple for treating the donkey so mercilessly. The duo felt that it was inappropriate for them to travel on the donkey and instead decided to carry the animal tied to a stick. As they crossed a bridge, the donkey unable to bear the strain of being carried upside down shook itself and in so doing slipped and fell into the river below and drowned.

When I take things said to me in a painful fashion, or when I am slighted, or worse, when I am put down, and I take these to heart I feel my self-worth diminish, I feel incompetent and unloved.

Gautama Buddha said, “When you do not accept gifts given to you, the giver has to take them back himself.” Similarly, when we experience rudeness and do not take it as a personal rejection, we force the giver or ‘causer’ of pain to reabsorb it and in so doing free ourselves from self-flagellation.

When we take things personally, particularly insults, our self-worth diminishes; we are bereft of gratitude and we feel resentful and angry. The toxicity that consumes us festers like an unhealed wound and, in time, embitters us.

The antidote for not taking things personally is to value ourselves and cherish the gifts we have, even if the lessons taught are painful. Sometimes we have to learn to thank our aggressor for helping us discover who we truly are. When we are able to feel for ourselves, we get in touch with the real ‘I’; the real ‘me’ who can help heal ‘myself’ and go forth into the world full of self-worth. When we are thus able to defend ourselves from self-regret and self-invalidation, we raise ourselves from penury to plenty, from subordination to self-empowerment and from grief to joy.

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