



The roots of a tall tree,
lying on the sand, washed out from the rocks,
carried onto the beach by ever changing waves,
seen by some occasional passer-by...
change, wherever we look!

Letter 19

Contemplating Outer Change

Dear friend,

After the exercises of the last letter, let's now appreciate life in another way! Our appreciation of just how precious each and every moment of this life is will grow even stronger once we become aware of change. This may come as a surprise to you, because change is so often unwanted and as such is rarely appreciated. However, awareness of change can indeed stimulate joy and gratitude. At least in the long run becoming aware of change helps us in becoming truly happy!

It is essential to become aware of change, often known as "impermanence" in Buddhist texts. Everything changes – we cannot avoid that. Tell me one thing that doesn't change! From the largest to the smallest, everything changes. The whole universe with its millions of galaxies is changing; all the stars and planets are changing under the influence of forces far beyond our control. The atmosphere around our planet Earth changes, the continental shields that make up its surface change, the scorching molten rock within our planet is in a constant state of ebullition. From the top of the mountains down to the depth of the oceans everything changes - the clouds in the sky as well as each blade of grass. Scientists can observe change even down to the smallest subatomic particles.

If even this so-called 'solid' world changes constantly – is it then necessary to mention living beings? Life is unceasing change – and this is true for all beings down to the tiniest bacteria or virus – change is the common nature we all share. This is sometimes difficult to accept. When health changes to illness, when a seemingly stable relationship breaks apart, when a

beloved person dies – in those moments change is not welcome. It even frightens us to just think of it happening in the future.

Exercise: *Let us contemplate the outer aspects of change. We need to contemplate the changing nature of every single thing until we come to the definite certainty that there is no aspect of life that would be everlasting or permanent. Contemplate deeply over many days and try to find out whether there is any exception to the rule of life that everything changes. It might sound trivial at first, but please do not bypass this important contemplation. It is so extremely beneficial to look deeply step by step with many examples into the inevitable change of (a) all material things, (b) of our possessions, (c) of our body, (d) of our relationships, (e) of ourselves, and (f) of life itself. Go through these contemplations in that order, moving from the gross level to the more subtle. These contemplations are not only done in one moment of our life but will accompany us all along our spiritual path.*

Carrying out these contemplations fully will lead to a deep awareness of change that accompanies us everywhere we go, in all situations. It will greatly reduce our grasping to a seeming solidity of our world – we end up basically giving up the fighting against changes. Rather we begin to accept the real challenge of life: to move skilfully with change, giving wise impulses in changing situations and thus shaping them according to our possibilities.

With best wishes for becoming friends with change,

Tilmann Lhundrup

PS. For a traditional introduction to impermanence see chapter 4 in Gampopa's "Jewel Ornament of Liberation". More will definitely need to be said on the topic and we will continue with more reflections on change in the next letter.