



We can take meaningful action
like building "bridges over troubled water"

Letter 23

Using change for constructive action

Dear friend,

After four successive letters on change and impermanence a different perspective might be needed. Although understanding change means understanding life, an overemphasis on change might create a picture of utter instability and uncertainty. This in turn might paralyze all meaningful action and would not be in accordance with reality either. Contemplating change is simply a remedy to correct our naïve beliefs in stability, but as with all remedies it can be overused. It might turn against us, in the sense that any form of constructive action might seem utterly meaningless in a constantly changing world. Why bother if nothing remains the same for even an instant anyway?

To correct this overemphasis on change we need to become aware of the stabilizing forces that create a coherent flow of life experiences due to the laws of causality. It is not just any change that happens but lawful change. Life experiences arise in dependence on causes and conditions, and this is actually what gives coherence to life. Life is not a haphazard adventure but follows sequences of cause and effect within the context of each and every thing being interdependent. The awareness of change and the awareness of interdependence and conditionality complement each other.

To put it simply: an apple will not by chance become a cherry but will change to become a rotten apple or a sweet layer on top of an apple pie or something else within the range of possible changes for an apple. The apple is bound to change – that cannot be avoided; but all the possible changes that it may go through occur in accordance with causes and conditions. If we know how to skilfully influence the conditions, we will get the desired result: an apple pie. And this is the same for all changing situations: we have the possibility to play an active role. We are not just victims of change; we are also agents within that change.

Our actions produce the desired result if we know how to influence that change sufficiently.

Exercise One: Observe the conditions that influence change. For example, a leaf falls from a tree – what are the causes and conditions that make it fall exactly in the place where it will finally touch the ground? Forces of gravity, weight, shape of the leaf, wind... Explore similar situations where you can observe changes and their causes and conditions.

Exercise Two: Now, let's try to influence those changes: divert the flow of water, influence the falling of a leaf, enhance or lower the heat of fire, transform an apple into apple purée...

Exercise Three: Observe how every single act of body, speech and mind has an influence on various aspects of life and is thus an active participation in change. This will lead you into observing karma: the effect various actions have...

The fact that everything changes makes it possible to give direction to our lives. Let's use this possibility wisely. We can take life into our hands – but we have to know in which direction we want to go and how to accomplish that goal.

With best wishes for skilful action,

Tilman Lhundrup