



Letting Go into Our Freedom

Letting go is the essence of the spiritual life the heart of spiritual practice. Beginning to let go brings an immediate and profound revelation. Only when we are no longer full of opinions and expectations are we truly receptive. Only when we are no longer afraid of loss do we begin to open in a wholehearted way to the world around us. In the discovery of aloneness is the discovery of what it means to be truly together with others. Letting go is an expression of compassion for ourselves and of love for the universe we live in.

In traveling this path of inner transformation, we are encouraged to let go of everything, to relinquish every form of clinging. We are encouraged to let go of preoccupations with the past, investment in the future, and clinging in the present. We are encouraged to renounce our images, expectations, fears, and guilt. We are taught that holding is the path to limitation, letting go the direct path to awakening. This letting go is what allows us to be fully present here rather than occupied with what was or what we hope for.

It may feel like a severe and formidable teaching. We may wonder if there will be anything of meaning left to us after this letting go. We may fear that we will be left passionless, empty, and directionless when we have let go of everything that used to define us. We have learned to equate being without with deprivation and being alone with loneliness. If this total letting go is the price of freedom, we may doubt if we are prepared or even able to pay it. Yet our openness repays us at every step.

In spiritual life there is no room for compromise. Awakening is not negotiable; we cannot bargain to hold on to things that please us while relinquishing things that do not matter to us. A lukewarm yearning for awakening is not enough to sustain us through the difficulties involved in letting go. It is important to understand that anything that can be lost was never truly ours, anything that we deeply cling to only imprisons us.

The spiritual life is to learn the joy of letting go, and this great art serves us in any circumstance, so we may meet both the robber in our own cave and the inevitable changes in our life with grace. Letting go allows us to live wisely. Life is inevitably a process of letting go into greater and greater capacities of being, from infant to child, adolescent to adult. Letting go of our fears and habits allows a more spacious wisdom to emerge. Moving through this changing world and letting go of the beliefs, the attachments, the fixed sense of ourselves one day at a time is to travel with a graceful and spacious heart. To release the old is to allow the new to be born. This is freedom.

When we see clearly, we discover that we are never actually the owners, the possessors, of the things in our life. Our homes, the things we call mine, even our children are here with us only for a time. We live in relationship to them either skillfully and wisely or graspingly and unwisely. Even our bodies do not belong to us. They are gifts, which will change and eventually need to be released in their own way. Their changing cycles reflect the very nature of the world. We cannot possess them *nor* can we stop them. We are asked to relate wisely to them and all things, not by holding and possessing but by loving. To do this is to let go one moment at a time in the spirit of love and respect. When we learn to be truly present, we discover that what we deeply seek has always been with us.

The joy expressed by the stories of this chapter is the same joy we will find as we let go. In reading these stories, we might reflect on what is hardest for us to let go of and why. What do we need to let go of in order to live more freely? Where do we cling to ideas and expectations that keep us from fully loving those around us? What do we possess that keeps us from being free? Can we imagine what changes would occur if we let go?