

Awake with Accruing, Accelerating Adversity

Beloved Sangha,

I sent an earlier form of this message, *Awake with Adversity*, in 2020, at the beginning of the covid lockdown. Because we are in a continuing time of accruing, accelerating adversity, nationally and globally, I have expanded that message and am offering this revised version now. May it be a source of guidance, support, and inspiration as we live into this era together.

What is most crucial during times of adversity is learning to find our awake nature, again and again, in the midst of adversity and as our ongoing practice with adversity. Finding our awake nature along the path includes all of its unfolding manifestations--becoming increasingly established in embodied aware presence as our stable basis of operation, increasingly emanating the four immeasurables and all the other essential radiances as our ongoing configuration of being, showing up fully, loving well, and being available to others to the best of our ability, in whatever ways our lives allow and call for.

Although we are not required to pray for adversity like the Mahasiddhas, we *are* required, as spiritual practitioners and aspiring bodhisattvas, to embrace adversity when it arises, to relate with it as fuel for awakening rather than through the mind of hope and fear with its compulsive reactions of grasping and aversion. But we can only embrace the adversity of relative conditions if we are anchored in something deeper.

Engaging with relative reality--skillfully, lovingly, compassionately, wisely, and creatively--is an imperative of being human. Being anchored in that which is deeper than relative reality is an imperative of being awake.

While it is a beautiful and indelible feature of our humanity that we need the sustenance we find at relative levels throughout our whole lives, especially in our closest and most vital relationships, the touchstone of being a spiritual practitioner is recognizing that we cannot rely on relative reality as our stable basis, for it is by its very nature unstable—changing, evanescent, and impermanent. We can find our stable basis only when we are anchored in deeper reality, in that which does not alternate when relative conditions alternate, in that which is unchanging, unwavering, unceasing, and unconditional.

Adversity is a powerful reality check that shows us the extent to which we have or have not cultivated this stable basis.

If the inevitable vicissitudes of relative conditions leave us feeling as though the rug has been pulled out from under us, the message from reality is that we have been standing on the wrong ground, implicitly assuming or expecting an unrealistic degree of stability from a dimension of reality that is intrinsically unstable. The conventional person reacts to this message by panicking, collapsing, dissociating, or otherwise unraveling. The spiritual practitioner responds to this message by bowing to and aligning with its fierce, compassionate imperative: to find the true ground in the midst of relative instability, and to

embrace adversity as the ultimate spiritual practice, the ultimate bodhisattva training, the ultimate alchemical fuel—not because we like it or want it, but because it is here.

The sangha is a vehicle for those drawn to the sacred human possibility of awakening, of increasingly embodying the light of our awake nature and bringing that light into our world, which so desperately needs this from us. In accordance with this, I ask that we all be willing to embrace adversity as path, as an invitation, inducement, and imperative toward awakening, with a clear intention and steadfast resolve that will foster a growing capacity to transmute whatever adversities life brings us, both personal and collective, into alchemical fuel—for our own greatest well-being and for the benefit of all beings.

If you are dealing with painful feelings and circumstances, let that tenderize you. If you are drowning in painful feelings and circumstances, let that galvanize you—to find your awake nature in even the most difficult relative conditions, and become increasingly established in your awake nature as the changeless host of your changing human experience, as the true ground that brings stability in the midst of relative instability.

This is not instead of fully and deeply grieving what is painful and heartbreaking; rather it contextualizes our grieving so that it *opens us to reality, as it is*, rather than enclosing us within our separate-self attitudes and stances that constitute our reactions to reality.

As bodhisattvas, we are asked to bring light into darkness, not collapse in the darkness, which only compounds our predicament rather than contributing a remedy. We are reaching critical mass in so many arenas, any one of which could unleash a cascade of incalculable suffering in a world already groaning under that weight. Our world and the living beings within it need every one of us who carries the possibility of awakening in this life, of becoming even a little more awake in this life, to cut through unnecessary, obsolete tendencies and preoccupations now, and allow the great being, the great light within you, to come forth. I deeply request this of each of you, based on my direct knowing of your heart and my profound respect for your capacity.

However, awakening does not just happen, and it does not happen suddenly. There can be sudden flashes of awakening, even sudden extended interludes of awakening, but true, sustained awakening that is fully integrated and embodied is always gradual, and accrues gradually over time, across many small moments and many small choices to turn toward our deeper nature rather than retrace or succumb to karmic habits.

While all the teachings and practices of the sangha support this journey of embodied awakening, there are some very simple ones that can be used at any time, throughout the day, and especially whenever you are struggling with a difficult experience.

These include the practice of *I am here, I am open, I am awake* (connect with belly, heart, and awareness), and *I'm willing to include (my difficult feeling or experience)*.

Also: *I feel (difficult feeling), I am aware that I feel (difficult feeling), I am aware.* (Flash on awareness, lean into awareness, sustain continuity of awareness.)

Then: *I am aware that I am aware.* (Flash on self-knowing awareness, awakened awareness, nondual awareness, indestructible clear light. Take refuge in clear light.)

In a simple yet direct way, these basic practices allow us to include the *content* of our experiencing while increasingly shifting the *context* of our experiencing in the direction of our awake nature. And this shift is a hallmark of awakening: not trying to change the content of our experiencing, but learning to find the changeless context within which our changing human experience occurs—our changeless nature as stable, unwavering, illumined, aware presence.

Awakening unfolds when we increasingly orient toward and become established in this changeless context amidst the changing waves of relative reality, rather than being governed by our habitual reactions to the changing waves of relative reality. While this does impact and transform the content of our experiencing over time, this occurs as a natural byproduct of shifting the context of our experiencing, not through a dualistic agenda of trying to have a different experience.

Our karmic habits are a very poor host for difficult life experiences. Our awake nature is the only host that allows us to navigate difficult life experiences skillfully, wisely, lovingly, compassionately, and creatively, furthering our own evolution toward awakening and allowing us to be of greatest service to others.

My deepest prayer and commitment to the sangha as we live into this era together is that we use adversity to become more awake and less reactive, more courageous and less cowardly, more available and less self-preoccupied, more unconditionally present with all of reality and less mired in habitual attitudes and stances toward reality. Let us open fully to reality on its terms, not ours, for those are the only terms available. Let us take the journey life offers us, and navigate that journey so that it becomes a journey of awakening, of bringing light into darkness, of letting the separate self with its hopes and fears, positionalities and despondencies, increasingly dissolve into the compassionate, radiant bodhisatva wanting to emerge within us and live through us—our greatest human possibility and our world's greatest need.

As the changing waves of relative reality erode the false ground of our comfort zones, of even our most cherished and righteous assumptions and certainties, let us heed this as a call to find and deepen our refuge in the true ground—our changeless nature—so that we may be in service to relative reality rather than undone by it. Let the intensity of adversity become the fire of alchemical possibility.

We are all in this together, and the alchemical vehicle that is our sangha includes our deep interconnectedness with one another. Therefore every small step you take in the direction of your awakening supports that possibility for everyone. Your awakening matters, now more than ever.

I am ever with you, with all my love and in unwavering solidarity with your unfolding.
Jennifer