



Start Where You Are, by Pema Chodron

We already have everything we need. There is no need for self-improvement. All these trips that we lay on ourselves--the heavy-duty fearing that we're bad and hoping that we're good, the identities that we so dearly cling to, the rage, the jealousy and the addictions of all kinds--never touch our basic wealth. They are like clouds that temporarily block the sun. But all the time our warmth and brilliance are right here. This is who we really are. We are one blink of an eye away from being fully awake.

Looking at ourselves this way is very different from our usual habit. From this perspective we don't need to change: you can feel as wretched as you like, and you're still a good candidate for enlightenment. You can feel like the world's most hopeless basket case, but that feeling is your wealth, not something to be thrown out or improved upon. There's a richness to all of the smelly stuff that we so dislike and so little desire. The delightful things--what we love so dearly about ourselves, the places in which we feel some sense of pride or inspiration--these also are our wealth.

When we hear about compassion, it naturally brings up working with others, caring for others. The reason we're often not there for others--whether for our child or our mother or someone who is insulting us or someone who frightens us--is that we're not there for ourselves. There are whole parts of ourselves that are so unwanted that whenever they begin to come up we run away.

Because we escape, we keep missing being right here, being right on the dot. We keep missing the moment we're in. Yet if we can experience the moment we're in, we discover that it is unique, precious, and completely fresh. It never happens twice. One can appreciate and celebrate each moment--there's nothing more sacred. There's nothing more vast or absolute. In fact, there's nothing more!

Only to the degree that we've gotten to know our personal pain, only to the degree that we've related with pain at all, will we be fearless enough, brave enough, and enough of a warrior to be willing to feel the pain of others. To that degree we will be able to take on the pain of others because we will have discovered that their pain and our own pain are not different.

--Pema Chodron

