



What Do I Really Need Right Now?, by Sharon Salzberg

An essential question we might ask ourselves is, 'What do I really need right now, in this moment, to be happy?' The world offers us many answers to that question: You need a new car and a new house and a new relationship and But do we really? 'What do I lack right now? Does anything need to change in order for me to be happy? What do I really need?' These are powerful questions.

"When I have gone on retreat in Southeast Asian countries there is generally no charge for staying at the monasteries or the retreat centers, where all of the food is donated. Often it is donated by groups or families who come to the center to make the offerings. I'm sure that all of these groups of people offer absolutely the best that they can afford, but each day what is provided can differ quite a lot depending on the circumstances of those who are donating. Sometimes it is a lavish, bountiful feast. Sometimes it is quite meager, because that is all that the family can provide.

"Time after time, I went into the dining room for a meal and looked at the faces of the people who had made the offering, since they commonly come to watch you receive it. They would look radiant, so happy that they'd had an opportunity to feed us, to offer something that would help sustain us. They seemed so happy that we were going to be meditating, exploring the truth, and purifying our minds and hearts on the strength of their offering. In that moment, when they were so genuinely grateful for the chance to give, I would ask myself, 'What do I really need right now in order to be happy?' I realized that I was getting fed a lot more by their joy and delight than I was by the actual food.

"The Dalai Lama has said, 'If you are going to be selfish, be wisely selfish.' In other words, if we carefully look at our lives we can see that we spend an awful lot of time looking for happiness in the wrong places and in the wrong ways. We yearn to be happy, and this is right. It is appropriate; all beings want to be happy. The problem is not in the urge, or yearning, but in our ignorance. So very often we don't know where happiness is to be found — that is, true and genuine happiness, abiding happiness — and so we flounder, and we suffer and cause suffering to others.

"As I go through all kinds of feelings and experiences in my journey through life — delight, surprise, chagrin, dismay — I hold this question as a guiding light: 'What do I really need right now to be happy?' What I come to over and over again is that only qualities as

vast and deep as love, connection, and kindness will really make me happy in any sort of enduring way."

-- Sharon Salzberg, excerpted from "The Kindness Handbook: A Practical Companion" [<http://www.sharonsalzberg.com/books-audio/97>]

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