

'I'll Take Two, Please'

by Karen Horneffer-Ginter

"If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."

-- Meister Eckhart

When I was in Bali several years ago, I had the good fortune of visiting several temples. Before entering each one, we were asked to tie a sash around our waist as a symbolic gesture of "containing our appetites" as we prayed. It seems that the Balinese believe in the power of prayer, and even more so, in the value of asking only for what is most needed, and not more.

I found this ritual and way of thinking quite striking, especially in contrast to the "abundance" mentality in our culture. For years, I've listened to public figures and motivational authors encourage me to think big, dream big, and imagine big. As the message often goes: "The sky is the limit, but only if you believe that you're deserving of such great things." In contrast, the Balinese encouragement to pray small felt surprisingly refreshing.

While there is something to be said for setting big goals and wishing for grand things, I'm also aware of the shadow side of such ways of thinking. When we sit with a large cup of wanting, it takes a lot to feel filled up. It can make it harder to experience gratitude for what we have when it's being measured as less than what we're hoping for.

As I tied my sash and entered their temples, I reflected on how entitled I've acted at times, with my big wishes and dreams -- how I possess my own inner-version of that girl from Willy Wonka who "wants the golden goose and wants it now." In recognizing this, I thought that maybe I should ask for a second sash, just to offset my cultural tendencies. Mostly, I wanted -- and still want -- that second sash to avoid the suffering that comes from wanting more than what life can really offer. It's safer to stick with wanting to want less, especially so that we can experience the relief and joy that come from allowing things to be as they are.

I trust that a healthy balance can exist between "dreaming big" and "wanting small." This is especially true if we're able to keep our desires and aspirations in proper proportion with our gratitude and good intentions. By balancing these things, we can set our sights to achieve extraordinary things, practice thankfulness for what we have, and stay grounded in the wisdom that we don't always know what our life might hold and what is in our best interests.

I felt this type of balance as I knelt in those Balinese temples with a sash tied around my waist, a sense of gratitude in my heart, and a metaphoric sparkle in my eye for all that I dreamed my life might hold.

I hope that you, too, can experience a sense of ease between your wishes for what might be and your gratitude for the beauty of what is.