

From Greed to Divine Abundance

Spiritual Wisdom

Who is rich? The one who appreciates what he has.

—Talmud

I've enjoyed the comforts and pleasures of life as much as anyone else — well, maybe not quite as much as some, having spent ten years living a monastic life in an Indian-based ashram. But then I had a chance to try out the other side, when I moved from the ashram to Hollywood. Within a few years, I went from living a very simple life to generating a six-figure income and hanging out with actors, directors, and other folks “in the biz.”

A few years later, another shift came when I was recovering from some health issues, beginning a new career as author, and focusing on spiritual and charitable works, while once again living a simple and austere life.

One thing I've learned from these materialistic ups and downs is that the amount of happiness experienced from acquiring things is relative to what you have at the time. On one particular day in the ashram, I remember experiencing great happiness from buying a new toothbrush. I returned from the store and happily showed my acquisition to a visiting acquaintance, who said, “Now I know this yoga really works if you can be so happy about a toothbrush!”

In fact, it has become clear to me that contrary to what all those commercials say, the relationship between external accoutrements and inner happiness is sketchy at best. I know many who have gone to great lengths to satiate all their desires, yet who seem less deeply fulfilled than those who have less.

Isn't it true that gourmet food on a full stomach doesn't taste nearly as good as even the simplest fare when you're exceptionally hungry? The understanding that no quality can exist without its opposite helps to bring a sense of comfort to even the most troublesome times. Without darkness, there is no light; without sorrow, no joy; without hunger, no satiation.