

# The Inner Smile of Peace

By Ajahn Chandako

These days anxieties have become so 'normal' that we may no longer recognize how they sap our energy and light-heartedness; so normal that we may have forgotten what it feels like to live with a heart so buoyant and unencumbered that it regularly lights up with an inner smile of peace. Now, this inner smile of peace is a bit different from a loud guffaw. When the heart is light, laughter comes easily, but sometimes boisterous laughter may simply hope or pretend to display a degree of freedom that isn't really there. All too often it's a bandage to temporarily cover over our pain. The inner smile of peace flows quickly to one's face when there is a moment that warrants it, but its default position is to remain quiescent behind a face of stillness. The inner smile may even express itself as sadness in the eyes of a person who sees others laughing at things that aren't funny, crying over things that are normal, angry about things that are silly or worrying about things that don't exist. The big fat 'Buddhas' with their somewhat grotesquely exaggerated grins are not actually Buddhas at all. From the earliest attempts to replicate the self-enlightened one's human form in stone, wood, paint or clay, the Buddha's face has been represented with a visage of serenity—with just a hint of a smile.

I recently came across a quote:

"There are so many reasons to be frantic, to run from one thing to another, to be pumped high with anxiety and dread. And yet—as we know in our hearts—it is even more of a priority to keep an occasional appointment with someone we neglect in our normal frenzy: a deeper, quieter part of ourselves. It seems everything we do matters so much, but to stay sane we need to hear a different, more humbling message."

Everything we identify with—from the perspective of geology and astrophysics—is relatively meaningless. From a biological point of view it's apparent that our bodies are not who we really are. Meanwhile, the vast majority of our thoughts, worries and concerns—when viewed from a neurological or meditator's perspective—are mere conditioned responses. And yet it is so easy to cling tightly to it all. When seen with the subtle wisdom of an enlightened one, most of these preoccupations are recognized as pernicious hindrances to our freedom. The sensitivity needed to gain this healing perspective can be found in mindful awareness and expanded through meditating on peace. Like seeing an ocean touch the horizon or staring into a clear night's sky of infinite stars, meditation can help remind us of our proper place in the enormity of existence.

The quote continues:

“We should learn to develop a readier awareness of our beautifully miniscule place in the wider scheme of things, to free ourselves from our constant debilitating anxieties, to bring a little perspective back to our needlessly tense and preciously brief lives.”

Though a certain amount of anxiety has come to be accepted as normal in the modern world, it's not what the Buddha or Ajahn Chah considered normal. So strive for a new normal: the inner smile of peace.

Ajahn Chandako