

**"CAN DO, WHY NOT, NO PROBLEM" (Advice from Tibetan teacher Shantideva)  
January 2009 newsletter**

Within the demands of life, including the struggles and disappointments, so much changes when we can recall the attitude: "CAN DO, WHY NOT, NO PROBLEM". What a joy to approach life situations with this energy!

As a Zen student, I was intuitively taken with the paradoxical teaching: "because it is impossible, we do it". Usually we like to be optimistic and say: "I can do that, I am strong, smart, willful, capable etc." If you are lucky, this kind of bountiful optimism will be tempered, though not destroyed, by life's inherent disappointments. Does this sound negative? Please, take a fresh look and consider how important your "failures" have been for your heart opening and awakening consciousness.

What is the connection between "can do" and "it is impossible"? ("It" means: realizing our ideals, causing no harm, meeting all situations with peace and love, being in Truth with Self and Life).

As we enter the New Year, with its unknown joys and challenges, I rest in the knowledge that I will make many, many mistakes. My perfectionism will once again be punctured by the unfolding of life. Learning to be True will be humbling and, if I resist this learning, perhaps even humiliating. This is how "it is" and I am grateful for this truth.

Our ideals serve us by giving direction for our actions yet they can be infinitely destructive when used as justification for violence and judgment toward self or others. I encourage you to be fully conscious of this distinction. So we need our ideals for our striving and it is impossible to fully actualize these images.

We can never circumvent the facts that: 1) matter, including our bodies, always disintegrates and 2) today we are one day closer to our death than yesterday. This is the good news! Without the certainty of our end, we might waste much time in learning how to open our hearts. To accept the truth of our limitations and still continue on the path is called dedication. Rather than dwelling in despondency perhaps we can find: "can do, why not, no problem".

Each day I am surprised by the persistence of old habits, patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that clearly create suffering. While the general trajectory of my life is toward a reduction in these behaviors, the journey is anything but linear. Sometimes, like a groundhog lifting its head out of the winter ground, an old "something" will appear. My practice is to relate to these 'appearances' with greater and greater equanimity and kindness. After all, Life is impossible, therefore we live it.

My encouragement to us all is to laugh more at foibles and mistakes. I promise that your body, as well as your ambitions, will eventually humble you. And yet because it is impossible, we do it. Let's endeavor to approach this life with the imperturbable attitude: "CAN DO, WHY NOT, NO PROBLEM".