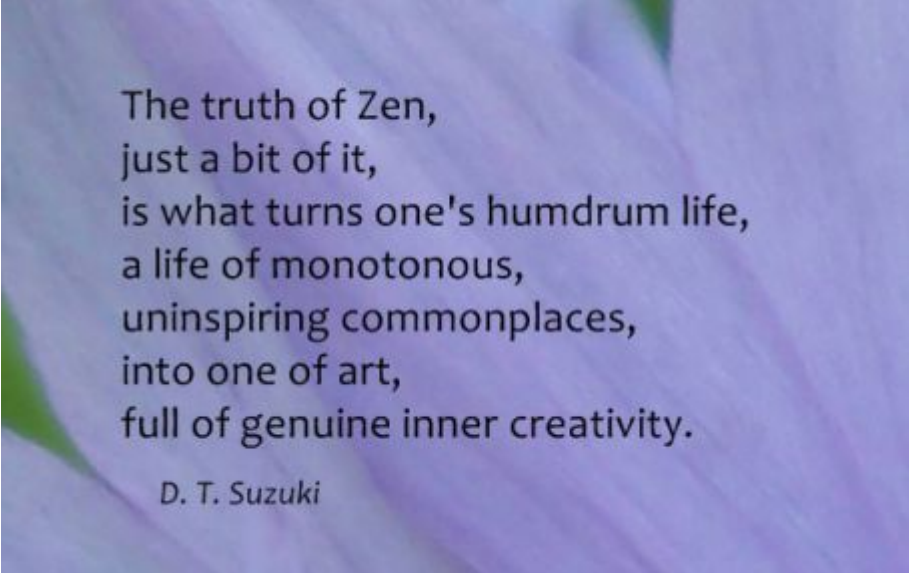


Un-Stuck in Traffic: How to Bring Joy to Life's Otherwise Annoying Moments



The truth of Zen,
just a bit of it,
is what turns one's humdrum life,
a life of monotonous,
uninspiring commonplaces,
into one of art,
full of genuine inner creativity.

D. T. Suzuki

We've all been there, stuck in a heap of bumper-to-bumper traffic seemingly going nowhere, perhaps for hours. Some of you may even experience this on a daily basis during your commutes to and

from work. In that case, there's really no escaping this necessary evil and unfortunately being stuck in traffic is a huge cause of stress, anxiety, even divorce (yes, really! – according to a Swedish study), but WHY is that? And does it really *have* to be so dang unnerving?

While not often seen as the most joyful of times, it's (long) moments like these in life that can often teach us so much, about life, other people and most importantly ourselves, if we only know to stop and look. A simple shift in attitude is really all it takes and we all have this ability to choose how we react in ANY given situation. I know, easier said than done, right?

When you're potentially going on 4 hours of sleep due to a crying baby that kept you awake most of the night, or your day started off with you tripping over the rug, spilling your morning coffee all over yourself, and landing face-first on the cat, I get that it can be challenging to put on a smiling

face. But the fact remains, you CAN do it, and it forever remains your choice in any given moment whether to stay in mood reactive to what happened to you previously, or to start fresh in this moment...or in this one...or this one. That is the beauty (and purpose, in my opinion) of free will.

I think we are all in this subconscious belief that time is our relentless enemy that is always racing against us, stealing moments of our lives away. And this in turn causes us to be somewhat anxious and to hurry along; eager to squeeze the most we can out of every single day, which actually lets these moments pass through our awareness with little to no attention at all. We think we are doing our best to manage our time, but my friend, time is but an illusion.

“I have realized that the past and future are real illusions that they exist in the present, which is what there is and all there is.” – Alan W. Watts

When we take into account that there is only ever NOW and that life is made up of nothing but a bunch of “nows “ instead of “back then’s” and “will be’s”, a whole new perspective opens up. It becomes easier for us to let go of what was and what we foresee and hope will come to pass in our lives and to just be present. I’m sure you’ve heard the phrase, “when you are depressed, you are living in the past and when you are anxious you are living in the future”. This couldn’t be truer for when we allow the mind to dwell on moments of the past, (memories) they cause within us a sense of longing or loss if we hold too tightly. This is not to say that thinking back to those sunny days of your childhood laying in the grass watching the clouds pass overhead is depressing, but rather if we *constantly* long for things that we no longer have, such as possessions, people, or pets, etc. this can definitely cause us to become depressed. It is healthy to learn to let things go...let them live on in your heart, and not stake claim in and rule over your mind.

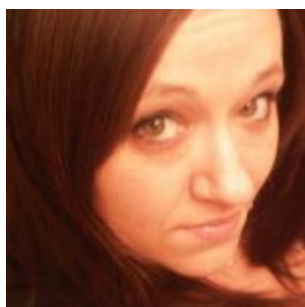
The same is true when we dwell too much in the future and worry ourselves with visions of old age where we are unable to walk or care for ourselves, or perhaps an economic collapse we feel is eminent. If we keep these visions in our present hearts, they will leave us always feeling like our peace and ability to relax is just out of touch; just out of reach. We can't relax, because "this" or "that" is going to happen...eventually. Oh, the stories we tell ourselves. And while it might even be justified, or can be statistically proven to be overdue to occur any day now, can you see how this is often what keeps many of us awake at night? What am I going to do? Am I well enough prepared? How will I pay that bill? How will I ever attract the person of my dreams? When we learn to surrender (not to naïve passivity, of course), but to a full-blown trust in your importance in this Universe and a knowing that when you allow yourself the freedom to truly be FREE in this moment and in every moment, then you will come to find that the joy of mere conscious presence will undoubtedly follow you into each and every moment as well. There is no other way.

And this is the secret of dealing with being stuck in traffic and any other "annoying" situation where you feel like you'd rather be anywhere but there, whether you find yourself in it once a year or twice a day. It's a matter of you *choosing* how valuable you see yourself; it truly is. Are you deserving of suffering through an agonizing hour of staring at the same damn bumper? Getting flipped off and yelled at by that ever so impatient woman who nearly caused an accident trying to merge into your lane? Being a victim to your emotion and thus reacting in anger by in turn cutting her off once traffic starts moving? Do you see the games at play here? We all just want to be seen, be heard, be noticed, be valued, and know we matter and are important; whether it's behind a wall or behind the wheel.

And if we all just took one precious moment to tell ourselves

rather than expecting the world to SHOW us...to know within ourselves that *of course* we matter, of course we are deserving to feel joy, to be at peace, to notice the beautiful sunrise coming up over the horizon, to smile as you hear the man next to you belting out the Eagles' "Take It Easy", to feel the warm fuzzies as you see sleeping twins snuggled in car seats in the mini-van behind you, to feel freedom as you watch a flock of geese travel overhead...then we'd start CHOOSING to put our attention on such things, rather than the fact of how bad traffic "absolutely sucks".

Beauty is everywhere...even in 2 hours of traffic. Joy is *always* there, waiting to be felt. Love is constantly awaiting YOUR gentle embrace. And connection to humanity; what could ultimately prevent all road-rage for the rest of eternity (yes, I am totally a former road-rager myself, believe it or not!), is there...RIGHT there is this moment uniting us all. We just have to stop, breathe, and choose to acknowledge it. Make it a daily choice as you do with your outfit or morning latte and we're all on a track to creating traffic Zen! OK, maybe I'm reaching a bit, but as with all things, when being kind to yourself (which is what this really is if you think about it) becomes a habit over time, and once you get the hang of it, you will refuse to let it go. And soon enough you just might be THAT guy belting "Take It Easy"...and you just might make someone else smile who landed face-first on their cat that day. ☐



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