

NEUTRALITY

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882

Days Down

This piece is about how I view the concept of "struggling" while in prison.

I've been in prison now for 883 days. That sounds like an eternity to some, but like nothing to many more. I still have family who apologize when they ask me how I'm doing. They'll say things like "Oh, obviously you're not doing well, you're in prison," like those two concepts are interdependent. They still refrain from telling me the fun things they're doing in their own separate lives they "don't want to make me feel bad", as if that's what my happiness is contingent upon.

The thing is, being in prison is my life now. Once I learned that I earned five years worth of days spent separate from what my life once was, that became a reality, regardless of the denial I consistently threw at it. Over bouts of depression, heartbreaks, confusion, and most of all time, I've come to accept this, albeit somewhat begrudgingly at first. I'd tell myself that since this is my life now, I can't spend time suffering. Ironically, I realized that I had been struggling so much back home, when my life was supposedly in order, to the point that it seemed like a huge waste to me to be locked in a cell for 23 hours a day and not learn to address and overcome the things that I struggled with.

I found a lot of indispensable help regarding this huge job in Buddhism. The core principle taught in Buddhism is that life consists of suffering, but there are ways to cultivate your mind, without the aid of another entity, to make it so that the things that would normally cause suffering can be viewed as neutral. Adopting this mentality has been life-changing to me, to the point where I find it hard to think of things I'm genuinely struggling with, even though I am where I am.

I can say I'm hung up on feeling abandoned by family and friends, that I don't know how to get over guilt that feels overwhelming sometimes, that I'll have a background when I get out of here, or that I never feel satisfied with what I do in my life. All of these things used to be huge struggles for me. But now they feel like inconveniences - like things that are unfortunate, but that are just circumstances that happen to exist at the same time everything else in my life is existing.

Some days are worse than others. Some days I feel completely trapped, like I'm in a maze with narrow walls and no exit in sight. And some days it feels like I'm fighting for no reason. But now those days are far and few between. For the first time in a while, I feel genuinely at peace with myself. Sure, there are things I'd like to change or things I'm going to spend years trying to overcome, but the difference is now I'm happy. I don't feel like I need to struggle anymore.