

# Beyond Hope: Taking Refuge in What Is

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It is easy to speak about accepting impermanence and much harder to live it. Heat, illness, pain, aging, loss, and countless other changes continually challenge the mind's capacity to rest with things as they are. Yet true refuge is found not by escaping change but by taking refuge in change itself.

When unpleasant experiences arise, attention often narrows around them. A sore throat, a painful tooth, or oppressive heat can suddenly seem to become the whole of experience, even though they occupy only a tiny fraction of what is actually present. The practice begins with simply recognizing:

"Oh, it's this right now."

Without trying to fix it, resist it, or make it disappear, there is an invitation to allow experience to be exactly as it is.

Most suffering does not come from unpleasantness itself but from resistance to unpleasantness. The mind continually returns to discomfort with thoughts such as:

"I wish this would change." Or "I hope this changes soon."

This attachment to pleasant experience and aversion to unpleasant experience is the very movement of **samsara**.

**U Tejaniya** humorously points to this tendency:

*"We don't like even the slightest bit of unpleasantness. Do you think that's fair?"*

Reality contains both pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Wanting only pleasantness is simply not in accord with the way things are.

**Trungpa Rinpoche** called this tendency "**comfort orientation**"—the habitual movement of the mind toward comfort and away from discomfort. Whether through distraction, entertainment, food, problem-solving, or endless self-improvement projects, much of human behavior is driven by the simple fact that we do not like unpleasantness.

One particularly subtle expression of this is **hope**.

Hope often goes unnoticed because it is generally considered a virtue. Yet hope frequently manifests as resistance to present reality. Beneath many thoughts and actions lies the quiet wish:

"I hope things go back to how they were." Or "I hope this changes."

There is nothing wrong with taking care of oneself, seeking treatment, or acting wisely. The question is whether those actions arise from wisdom or from aversion to what is.

A profound challenge of practice is learning to meet unpleasantness without immediately trying to escape it.

**Shantideva**, in the *Bodhicharyavatara* (Chapter 7, Verse 2), writes:

*"Heroic perseverance means delight in virtue. Its opposite may be defined as laziness, an inclination toward unwholesome ways, despondency, and self-contempt."*

This points to a subtle form of laziness: the unwillingness to open to unpleasant experience. The heart shrinks away from discomfort and demands that life be different.

Even spiritual practice can be driven by this movement. One may want awakening, enlightenment, or **Nibbana** as an escape from present experience. Yet **Nibbana** is not elsewhere. It is the complete surrender to the way things are, free from clinging, resistance, and demand.

Practice begins exactly where resistance is found. There is no need to pretend to be equanimous. There is no need to deny the hope that things will change. Instead, there is value in seeing clearly:

"I don't like this." Or "I want something else."

This honest recognition creates space.

In that space, a choice becomes possible. Conditions may not be under our control, but our relationship to them can change. Instead of being driven by hope, resistance, distraction, self-pity, or self-judgment, there can be a mature understanding:

"Things are as they are. How am I responding?"

Hope becomes a valuable object of practice because it reveals **clinging**. Whenever hope appears, it can function like a signal:

"Clinging is here. Please look."

The task is not to suppress hope or condemn oneself for having it. Rather, it is to observe it with curiosity and kindness. To see how the mind pulls away from the unpleasant, longs for the pleasant, and seeks relief.

By not immediately acting on those impulses, resilience gradually develops. It becomes possible to rest with the discomfort of resistance itself. Like gently stretching a tight muscle, one learns to remain present at the edge of discomfort without forcing, fighting, or withdrawing.

Again and again it becomes clear that resistance is impermanent. It arises, persists for a while, and then passes away. What once seemed overwhelming reveals itself as just another conditioned mental state.

This practice works directly with **clinging**, which the Buddha identified as the root of suffering. Beneath many layers of wanting lies a simple refusal to allow reality to be what it is.

The invitation is to embrace the totality of experience: the pleasant and the unpleasant. Not with resignation, but with openness, curiosity, and **metta**.

As **Mingyur Rinpoche** writes:

*"Feeling divided from ourselves and the world around us is the deceptive narrative of the grasping mind. But we can learn to let go of false hopes that leave us yearning for ease in our bodies and in this world. We can move beyond our discontent. We can replace longing with love. When you love the world, the world loves you back."*

The way forward is not through following hope, nor through fighting it, but through meeting it with kindness and clear seeing. Love even the yearning mind that wants things to be different. Love the pleasant and the unpleasant alike. Meet the whole of experience with a **metta** attitude—open, friendly, interested, and accepting.

In that surrender, the division between ourselves and the world begins to dissolve. The grasping mind relaxes. And refuge is found, not in getting what we want, but in fully opening to life exactly as it is.