

The Five Joys of Sickness (and Adversity)

By Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, 1993, with parenthetical commentary by Kathy Wesley, 1998. Although quoted in response to a question about sickness, these “Five Joys” can be remembered whenever adversity occurs.

1. My karma is ripening now, and not in the future.

When karma ripens while we are still alive, we actually should rejoice. This is because through our suffering, the negative karma we have accumulated in the past is being exhausted, and because we now have the opportunity to respond to our suffering with positive attitudes and action. When karma ripens after death, we no longer have control over our response, and are buffeted “like a leaf in the wind” by our suffering.

2. I can use the opportunity to practice Tong-Len (“Sending and Receiving”) by saying “May I take on the sickness of all sentient beings in this sickness of mine.” Sending and Receiving is a powerful method for transforming anything that happens to us into the path of awakening.

3. Through sickness one gives rise to compassion.

As we see our own suffering very closely and very clearly, we can see how universal suffering is and have more empathy for the sufferings of others.

4. Arrogance and distractions decrease. It’s hard to maintain feelings of superiority over others when we’re on our sickbed; we also become less distracted by what’s going on around us and become more focused on our dharma practice.

5. One gives rise to confidence in the law of karma; one is prompted to abandon non-virtuous (and self-destructive) behavior. When we see how we helped bring about our own suffering through our karmic actions of the past, we are inspired to trust that Karma is a real force in our life. Knowing this, we will be less likely to act in negative ways to harm ourselves and others.

