

Joyful Wisdom by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche (Bantam Press 2009)

It was interesting to note my initial reaction to this book - there was an instinctive "oh no not another buddhist self-help book". Maybe there was something in the format - it's a mass produced paperback with a monk in robes on the cover. But that was my reaction: the reality was actually this is an excellent book that skillfully weaves together different threads without compromising important points of principle.

It's well written and would make a great gift to anyone who is thinking about that perennial question of how to live better lives and to lessen the grip of anxiety. It might be assumed that anxiety is a relatively recent modern addition to the human condition but in fact anxious experiences have been with us for thousands of years - and part of the Buddha's teachings was how to resolve this anxiety.

'Joyful Wisdom' explains these teachings and is a pointer along the path towards calmness and confidence. Yongey Mingyur is open about difficulties (he struggled during childhood with fear and uncertainty) and his own experiences of awkwardness and alienation that is so common to this human condition. He uses this openness as a means of getting the message across - that there is a possibility of freedom. As he says "when we become fixed in perceptions, we lose our ability to fly" - and this flying arises from what buddhist texts describe as 'the magical display of awareness'.

There isn't a pretence that this is an easy route but it's clear that there is at least a potential of becoming less anxious and more connected, less agitated and more compassionate. As well as being an accessible guide inwards, this book is also of interest to experienced practitioners - he writes about the need to sometimes stop practicing and to change practice. And he movingly describes the last days of his father who was himself a highly respected meditation teacher: "...he approached each moment of pain as a focus of awareness through which his mind became more relaxed and stable...even in his last moments he looked at the process of numbness in his arms and limbs, the congestion in his lungs and the cessation of his heartbeat with a kind of child-like wonder as if to say 'these experiences are neither good nor bad - they're just what's happening in the present moment'".

I highly recommend 'Joyful Wisdom' and perhaps through applying its philosophies and its principles, we can become more relaxed, intuitively wiser and more open hearted.

Norman Blair May 2010