

*The Gift of*  
**SIMPLICITY**



*By Jacqueline Tao*

A couple of years ago, when I was about eleven or twelve years old, I went on a trip to Tibet with my family as part of my summer vacation. I remember our drive away from the city of Lhasa towards the other sights in the region. We stopped at the top of a mountain and witnessed the most typical Tibetan landscape--beautiful and desolate. With rocky mountains in every direction, minimal vegetation, and absolutely no urbanization, the only signs that anyone actually lived here were the long, crisscrossed chains of colorful fabric--Tibetan prayer flags.

I was surprised when I saw a group of small Tibetan children running towards us, dressed in tattered clothes, little faces lined with dirt. Unable to communicate due to language barriers, the children simply stood around us and were fascinated by the clothes we were wearing, the things we were holding, and everything about us. My mom brought out a bag of old snacks from our car and told me to give them out to the children, because otherwise we would just end up throwing them away anyways. I opened the bag of little pea-sized crackers and all the kids swarmed excitedly around it, trying not to miss the opportunity to get their share of a very rare foreign treat. This was probably the only special, tasty food they had eaten in a long time.

Eventually, I ended up having to scatter the remaining shares of the snacks, and the kids literally picked every one of the crackers off the ground and ate them. They had just picked food off of the ground that I would have thrown away, and yet they were extraordinarily happy and

excited that they even had the chance to taste it. I had rarely seen so little bring so much joy to people. Strained the kids were, living in this extremely harsh natural environment, to get adequate amounts of even the necessities of life, let alone any extra material gain. But that was precisely the reason they were so happy and appreciative. In their lives of extreme material simplicity, they had easily managed to find reason for great pleasure and satisfaction.

I often witness people getting overly absorbed in the world of material gain, something that can overshadow the importance of simplicity. The gift of simplicity gives us refuge from the ongoing struggle to gain more goods, more power, more wealth. Simplicity means appreciating the simplest joys of life, such as these children had done, and ignoring the complications that gain and greed might bring upon us. Simplicity is also emotional--letting go of all the worries and tensions in our lives and allowing ourselves to appreciate the moment. It allows us to harness the sources of happiness that we often overlook and take for granted.

Simplicity can help to reduce the stresses of competition and jealousy. Regardless of how much money or power one has, how fashionable of a car, how big of a house, how great of a reputation, we can all appreciate the gift of simplicity equally, and to as big of an extent as we want to. I admit that it is hard to forget the material cravings we all must have, but simplicity does not mean sacrificing these possessions; it means stepping aside from these pursuits and appreciating the simple, often overlooked happiness for a change.

The gift of simplicity is universal--it is available to everyone who recognizes and grasps it. At any given time or place, for any given person, there might be simple sources of contentment to be found; after all, the essence of simplicity is that with nearly no material possessions, one can find simple joys. The Tibetan children had to learn the gift of simplicity, and they grasped it well--they could laugh and rejoice for the ability to run free, for the occasional meeting of new people, for each other's company, for the fresh air, for a small scrap

of food picked off the ground. Each and every one of us can find the simplest things in our lives for which to be happy, emulating the children's example. There is no excuse to not appreciate the gift of simplicity. Simplicity doesn't require anything; it is always available, outstretched and ready for us to take.

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EXERCISE

*Simply Super*

Take a moment and drop all the materials from your hands. Temporarily abandon your computer, Blackberry, TV, iPod, etc. Go to an open space outside, and observe all the simple privileges and joys that are available to you: the fresh air, good weather, nice view, quietness/excitement, food to eat, and a place to call home. Take note of these things and learn to appreciate the simple things. Life *is* simply super when we eliminate the complexities and enjoy the simple gifts.



*"Breathe and appreciate the simplicity around you at any time, in any place." Jacqueline Tao*