



### **Thanks for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever**

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Have you ever been in a situation where you are talking on the phone to a customer service agent about a problem that you are having with their company? I had that experience recently when I was trying to make a change to my mobile phone service. It took me 30 minutes on their website just to find out how to be connected to a live agent after the service bot could not understand and solve my issues. The live agent couldn't help me either and I was told that I needed to go to the store (30 minutes away) to have them help me. I tried getting another live agent again and found one who understood the problem but who could not guarantee that the problem would not happen again. All of this took about four hours.

Imagine yourself in my place. Might you be tempted to share your frustration, get angry, say things that you might regret? Do you think that doing this might help?

#### **The Story**

Mark Van Burne in a Tricycle article<sup>1</sup> tells this story: "There was a Zen master named Sono who was a very intense and well-respected Buddhist teacher who offered everyone she would meet the same teaching: **"Thanks for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever."** No matter what was happening in someone's life, she would give this simple mantra and would have them repeat it day and night. One day a man came to see her looking to find ease in his heart, and she told him to repeat this mantra every morning, evening, and whenever anything whatsoever happened to him. The dedicated practitioner did as he was instructed for a whole year but came back frustrated because his heart was still not at peace. Nothing in his life had changed, he said. The mantra didn't work. He looked to Sono for further instructions to move forward, and she immediately said, "Thanks for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever." When the man heard these words, he burst into laughter and left in peace.

Van Burne asks: "What was it that this man realized that put his heart at ease? His life hadn't transformed after a year of practice, so what did he understand at that moment? More importantly, are we capable of realizing the same thing?"

Van Burne goes on to note: "I have my own interpretation of what this mantra is pointing to, but I feel like no matter what explanation I offer, it will miss the mark, as the true meaning of this story seems to be unspeakable."

My interpretation of this story is that the man suddenly realized that he was complaining about complaining.

### **What is complaining?**

A complaint is defined as a statement that a situation is unsatisfactory or unacceptable, a reason for dissatisfaction. Chris Neibauer notes that "By complaining, I mean objecting to things as they are in a way that isn't helpful, such as, "this cloudy weather is terrible!" A complaint is strictly an interpretation of events, a story, and a negative judgment."<sup>2</sup>

When we are dissatisfied with a situation, we often feel compelled to let others know how dissatisfied we are even when they are not involved. So, it's one thing to give feedback about an issue to the responsible person and another thing when that communication includes statements of dissatisfaction, frustration or similar emotions. The latter can be what we call complaining bitterly or whining.

### **Why is complaining unskillful?**

Complaining is unskillful because it leads to stress. Cultivating stress is the opposite of what the Buddha taught: stress and the cessation of stress.

Do you like to hear others complain?

Do you think that others like to hear you complain?

In his book, Chris Neibauer cites: "In one study, subjects were randomly assigned to one of two groups. The first group regularly described five things they were grateful for, while the second group listed five things they felt were a hassle. After ten weeks, the grateful group was more optimistic about the future, had fewer health complaints, and even spent more time exercising."<sup>3</sup>

### **Thanks for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever.**

The first phrase is critical. It shows that we have deep gratitude and are acknowledging an acceptance of life as it comes. It doesn't mean that we will not change things; it means that we focus on life as it comes and not spend time wishing that life would be different. After all as noted in the Second Noble Truth, the cause of stress is us wanting life to be other than it is. Thanks for everything reminds us that this is how life is now; we can't go back and change it.

Part of the problem is that we tend to judge our unpleasant experiences as good as bad and our pleasant experiences as good.

There is a Taoist story of an old farmer who had worked his crops for many years. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbors came to visit. "Such bad luck," they said sympathetically.

"Maybe," the farmer replied. The next morning the horse returned, bringing with it three other wild horses. "How wonderful," the neighbors exclaimed. "Maybe," replied the old man.

The following day, his son tried to ride one of the untamed horses, was thrown, and broke his leg. The neighbors again came to offer their sympathy on his misfortune. "Maybe," answered the farmer.

The day after, military officials came to the village to draft young men into the army. Seeing that the son's leg was broken, they passed him by. The neighbors congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out. "Maybe," said the farmer.

Are what we define as problems always bad? Try this thought exercise.

Bring to mind a problem that you are currently experiencing and think of as bad and stressful

Now see if you can think of that problem as being good for whatever reason. Do you still feel stressed about it?

What this shows is that you are creating the problem to be a problem. It is not the experience which is just due to causes and conditions.

### **I have no complaints whatsoever**

The second phrase: I have no complaints whatsoever, means that we aren't including our dissatisfaction and stress when we give feedback. We are simply stating the situation to inform others and seeking to find a possible solution.

What to do? In the Sutta, Well Spoken, the Buddha was talking about skillful speech when one of the monks, Ven. Vaṅḡisa, rising from his seat, arranging his robe over one shoulder, faced the Blessed One with his hands palm-to-palm in front of his heart and said, "An inspiration has come to me, Blessed One! An inspiration has come to me, One Well-Gone! [his name for the Buddha]"

"Let the inspiration come to you, Vaṅḡisa," the Blessed One said.

Then Ven. Vaṅḡisa praised the Blessed One to his face with these fitting verses:

"Speak only the speech  
that neither torments self  
nor does harm to others.  
That speech is truly well-spoken.

Speak only endearing speech,  
speech that is welcomed.  
Speech when it brings no evil  
to others  
is pleasant."<sup>4</sup>

### **Back to the phone call. What happened?**

I became clear to me that I was not going to get good phone service from this provider. This was life. So I cancelled my phone service and picked another provider that day. And actually, this has turned out to be a good move. There was no reason to complain to anyone.

## Final words

Mark Van Burne goes on in his article: “So are you willing to take on the mantra: “Thanks for everything. I have no complaints whatsoever.”? Are you willing to let go and stop resisting your life? Could you try pausing and slowing down long enough to allow the grace of appreciation and beauty to flow through you, and even if your life is currently not full of smiles, be willing to show up anyway with balance, joy, and ease? Can you show up and hold yourself, no matter what you did wrong today, no matter how much you may have messed up, and no matter how you’re feeling at this moment? Can you show up and sit with everything and love it anyway?”

I believe you can, and I wish you the best of luck!”

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<sup>1</sup> [Thanks for Everything. I Have No Complaints Whatsoever](#): A story about a Zen master reminds us to let go and stop resisting our lives. Mark Van Buren

<sup>2</sup> Niebauer Ph.D., Chris . No Self, No Problem: How Neuropsychology Is Catching Up to Buddhism (The No Self Wisdom Series) (p. 114). Hierophant Publishing

<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> [3:3 Well-spoken](#)