

## **Finding Balance When Life Feels Unfair**

When I was a kid, my parents read me a book called *The Contented Little Pussycat*. It was about a kitten on a farm who stayed happy no matter what nonsense the barnyard animals threw at her. Whether chasing her tail or sipping a cool bowl of milk, she found her joy. That book—good, bad, or indifferent—has shaped a lot of my life.

I took on the persona of “the happy one.” First, as a kid, it helped me avoid being yelled at or worse. Later, it became my go-to survival tool for relationships—trying to turn trauma into triumph by being *so* nice, so competent, so deserving that someone would notice and save me. Spoiler alert: it didn’t work.

Now, I’ve realized I was outsourcing my happiness, leaving it in the hands of others. Which, fun fact, feels pretty awful when life isn’t fair. Whether it’s mean people winning, betrayal by someone you trusted, or just plain bad luck, it’s a gut punch. That sense of betrayal cuts deep, especially when it clashes with our beliefs about how life *should* work. The knot in your stomach says, “This isn’t right,” and suddenly even breathing feels hard.

When this happens, I like to research Buddhist philosophy to see if it provides guidance and relief. Here are seven ways to rethink things when life feels unfair :

### **1. Understand Suffering (It’s Universal)**

Buddhism teaches us that suffering, or “*dukkha*” (isn’t that word oddly satisfying?), is part of life. Suffering comes not just from pain or bad luck, but from the gap between what we want and what reality serves up. When mean people succeed, someone betrays us, or we suffer a loss it widens that gap, and our brains scream, “This isn’t how it’s supposed to go!”

The first step is to admit that suffering is universal. Life’s not fair for *anyone*. Buddha’s Four Noble Truths teach that while suffering is part of life, there’s also a way to move through it. And—here’s the kicker—those tough times might just contain the lessons we need most.

### **2. Letting Go of Expectations (or “Chill, Just a Little”)**

One core idea in Buddhism is non-attachment. This doesn’t mean giving up hope or becoming a robot. It means letting go of the idea that life *must* go a certain way for you to be happy. Expect fairness? Sorry, but no guarantees. By loosening our grip on these expectations, we create room for peace.

Picture life as a river. If you’re clinging to a branch or trying to swim upstream, you’re going to exhaust yourself. But if you let go and go with the flow, it’s a lot easier to stay afloat. Same with life’s unfairness—the less you fight how things *are*, the more energy you’ll have to handle what comes next.

### **3. Compassion—Even for Jerks**

When someone's mean or unfair, it's natural to feel anger. But here's a reframe: what if their bad behavior comes from their own suffering? Buddhism encourages us to respond with compassion—not to excuse bad actions, but to stop the cycle of hurt.

One way to practice this is with “metta” or loving-kindness meditation. Start with yourself (you deserve it!), then extend goodwill to others, including people who've hurt you. It's not about letting them off the hook—it's about freeing yourself from the weight of anger.

Pro tip: Compassion doesn't mean you don't stand up for justice. It just means you're doing it from a place of strength, not spite.

#### **4. Focus on What You Can Control**

Buddhism's Eightfold Path is basically a to-do list for keeping your cool: act kindly, speak truthfully, think wisely. When the world feels chaotic, these small actions can anchor you.

For me, it's things like organizing a toy drive, supporting women-owned businesses, and overtipping every waitress I meet. No, these won't fix the world overnight. But they give me a sense of agency and align with my values—and that feels good.

#### **5. Remember: Everything Changes**

Another cornerstone of Buddhism is impermanence (“anicca”). Nothing lasts forever—not the good stuff, but also not the bad. Knowing this helps you hold onto hope when things feel bleak.

Impermanence also reminds us to savor the good moments. Even amid hardship, there are sunsets, belly laughs, and TV marathons with loved ones. These don't erase life's unfairness, but they're proof that joy still exists.

#### **6. Mindfulness: Be Here Now**

Mindfulness is about being present with what's happening—even when it's tough. Instead of spiraling into “what if” or “why me,” mindfulness helps you observe your feelings without getting swallowed by them.

Try this: Sit quietly and focus on your breath. When emotions come up, label them (“anger,” “fear,” “grief”), then go back to your breath. This simple practice creates space between your feelings and your reactions, making it easier to respond thoughtfully.

#### **7. Find Your People (and Your Laughs)**

You don't have to go it alone. Connect with like-minded folks—whether it's a meditation group, inspiring social media voices like Sharon Salzberg, or trusted friends. And don't forget humor! Shows like *The Daily Show* or podcasts like *The Stephanie Miller Show* remind us that we're not alone and give us a chance to laugh at the absurdity of it all.

Conclusion

As I sit here, sipping my coffee and reflecting on the lessons of “The Contented Little Pussycat,” it strikes me how much I’ve misunderstood that steadfast feline over the years. It wasn’t about blind optimism or grinning through the chaos of barnyard politics; it was about finding your own joy — and not relying on the outside world to provide it.

Life isn’t fair.

Sometimes the mean rooster gets all the credit, and the well-meaning goat eats your lunch. But like the contented pussycat, we can choose to lap up the cream of what’s good—the small, lovely moments of connection, laughter, and self-compassion—and let the rest be the leftover uncontrollable nonsense it is.