

**Restarting Dharma Espresso in 2018**

Good morning, everyone. This is today's Dharma Espresso on Restarting in 2018.

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Our coffee shop has been closed for almost a month now, for Tet celebration (Vietnamese Lunar New Year).

During that time, I received many emails and texts with very sincere and touching words. I didn't know you cared and loved me that much and how much you sincerely wish to study dharma teachings daily. I felt very touched. Not only did you encourage, but you also gave me inspiration to share with you more dharma teachings. I am determined to make free Dharma Espresso for you every day.

This new year is the Year of the Dog, which is called the Year of the Earth Dog. This year is predicted to have a lot of chaos but that is necessary before peace and tranquility can be restored. Let me tell you a story about the Year of the Earth Dog.

It was many years ago when I met a person named Kevin in the area where I used to live. He was a nice man who came to talk to me one day and shared his story. He had a lot of stress and problems at work. One day, he passed by the SPCA and found an abandoned puppy there. In a short time, if no one came to adopt this dog, it would be put to sleep. He couldn't let that happen, and out of sympathy, he brought the puppy home. But his wife didn't like it. She told him she didn't have time to take care of it. So, he took care of the dog, bought its food (of course when he's at work, his wife helped feed the puppy), brought it to training classes, etc. Raising a puppy is very time consuming.

Every morning, he talked to the puppy. When it got a little older, he took it for walks in the park. After work in the evening he also took the puppy for a walk in the neighborhood. After 6 months, the puppy grew into a fully mature dog. Thanks to dog walking, he felt relaxed and saw the beauty in his neighborhood that he'd never seen before. Keeping that dog forced him to make time for walking and also gave him the opportunity to take time to relax to see and enjoy the beauty around him.

At first, his wife resisted, but after walking with him once, she enjoyed it. The couple had time to talk and tell each other about silly things that made them laugh. According to him, those walking times were very healing to him, especially with the stressful life he had had with his company. Because of the walks he had with his dog, every morning and evening he felt less stressed.

Even though it's not a very special short story, I told it to you since this is the Year of the Dog. There are times when we adopt a very simple new habit or a new view; but don't underestimate this and the importance of the change. Sometimes, when we do not intend to make a change, a dog, a friend, a word from a mother or even from an enemy may impact us and make us change.

In our life, especially in a new year, think about something that can make us change, or else the years will keep piling up, and we will get older and older. Do not see our birthday celebration as a day for dancing, singing, and fun, but as a day to question ourselves. Have

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we done anything new, moved in a new direction, or do we just keep staying on the same train track of the past years, the same old self with nothing much to tell and be proud of?

A new year, a birthday, or the start of each day is the time for us to think about how to improve our lives for the better, especially to overcome our inner obstacles, and to let us see a brighter and more beautiful horizon.

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I have told you a dog story for the Year of the Dog. There are still many good stories, but we don't have enough time. All I wanted to do is to reopen our coffee shop again. Tomorrow, we will talk again about the topic of untying knots.

I wish you all a beautiful morning, and especially to the people in the East Coast, a warmer day, and like always, a happy and wakeful day.

Thank you for listening.

**Dharma Master Heng Chang**

*(Translated and transcribed by Compassionate Service Society)*