



Willing to Experience our Suffering, by Charlotte Joko Beck

A few weeks ago someone gave me an interesting article on suffering, and the first part of it was on the meaning of the word “suffering”. I’m interested in these meanings; they are teachings in themselves. The writer of this article pointed out that the word “suffering” is used to express many things. The second part “fer”, is from the Latin word “ferre”, meaning “to bear”. And the first part, “suf” is from “sub”, meaning “under”. So there’s a feeling in the word “to be under”, “to bear under”, “to totally be under” “to be supporting something from underneath.” [...]

So (remembering the definition of the word “suffer”) until we bow down and bear the suffering of life, not opposing it, but “absorbing it and being it” we cannot see what our life is. This by no means implies passivity or non-action, but action from a state of complete acceptance. Even “acceptance” is not quite accurate “it’s simply being the suffering. It isn’t a matter of protecting ourselves, or accepting something else. Complete openness, complete vulnerability is (surprisingly enough) the only satisfactory way of living our life. [“]

Our practice throughout our lifetime is just this: At any given time we have a rigid viewpoint or stance about life; it includes some things, it excludes others. We may stick with it for a long time, but if we are sincerely practicing our practice itself will shake up that viewpoint; we can’t maintain it. As we begin to question our viewpoint we may feel struggle, upset, as we try to come to terms with this new insight into our life; and for a long time we may deny it and struggle against it. That’s part of practice. Finally we become willing to experience our suffering instead of fighting it. When we do so our standpoint, our vision of life, abruptly shifts. Then once again, with our new viewpoint, we go along for a while “until the cycle begins anew.

Once again the unease comes up. And we have to struggle, to go through it again. Each time we do this “each time we go into the suffering and let it be” our vision of life enlarges. It’s like climbing a mountain. At each point that we ascend we see more; and that becomes broader with each cycle of climbing, of struggle. And the more we see, the more expansive our vision, the more we know what to do, what action to take.

--Charlotte Joko Beck, from “Everyday Zen: Love and Work”

