

July 29, 2015 Dharma Discussion Questions:

These questions are intended to provide some structure to our discussion of "Experiences and Experiencing", a selected reading from Charlotte Joko Beck's *Nothing Special*.

It is recommended that after you do the reading reflect on them PRIOR to our dharma discussion on July 29.

1. "So our lives become encounters with one object after another: persons, my lunch, my office. Memories and hopes are similar: life becomes a series of "this" and "that." We ordinarily see our lives as encounters with things "out there." Life becomes dualistic: subject and object, me and that."

Does this or other similar observations made by Joko resonate with your own practice? Why/Why Not?

2. In describing the "enlightened state" Joko describes it as "an absence of all experience. The enlightened state is pure, unadulterated experiencing. And that is utterly different from "having an enlightenment experience." Enlightenment is the demolition of all experience built of thoughts, fantasies, memories, and hopes. Frankly, we're not interested in demolishing our lives as we have ordinarily known them."

Do you find Joko conception, or for that matter, any conception of enlightenment helpful to your own practice? Why/Why Not?

3. "What pushes us to abandon this melodrama, to sit through the confusion? At bottom, it comes down to the unease we have with the way we are living our lives."

Is the unease in our lives what draws us to practice? In your own experiences, has practice enabled you to abandon a tendency to be melodramatic? If so, how?

4. We would rather be ruined than changed
We would rather die in our dread
Than climb the cross of the moment
And let our illusions die.

-W. H. Auden

Some might read Joko's literal interpretation of the first two lines of Auden's poem as overly cynical or negative. While Joko does ultimately use the the last two lines of the poem to make the point that the cross can also symbolize a crossroads in our lives and practice provides an opportunity to choose a more fruitful course of action. Some readers may find "dread" and "ruined" as overly vague categories of experiences rather than a multiplicity of emotions that we are experiencing at a given point in our lives. That is to say, it may not be productive to think of our lives as boiling down to one choice (to be "changed") over another (to be "ruined"). Is Joko contradicting the main point of her talk? If our lives are always changing we are always choosing, even at very subtle levels to be caught in unproductive emotional states or to let them be.

Please share your own reflections on this concluding section.