

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

# DROPPING OUR RESISTANCE TO WHAT IS

*It is not so much the thoughts themselves that cause us to suffer but rather our inner resistance to them.*

Any time we are experiencing agitation or unrest, one thing is certain. There is something in our experience that we are resisting. Suffering comes when we resist what IS.

When thoughts, feelings or emotions arise that are given an “OK” stamp of approval by the mental commentator, the voice in our heads that labels them as good or bad, they don’t trouble us in the slightest.

Thoughts and feelings which are deemed acceptable or desirable, such as happy thoughts, meet with no resistance whatsoever and do not cause us problems. They pass through our field of awareness unobstructed. Like friendly house guests, we are happy to receive them.

The moment an angry thought or a sad thought approaches, however, our shackles are up and it is greeted at the door with a loud inner “NO”. It is not so much the thoughts themselves that cause us to suffer, rather our inner resistance to them.

Thoughts themselves are neutral. They simply appear from nowhere, as we saw in the previous analogy of cars randomly appearing on the road. It is our habitual pattern of welcoming

the appearance of some thoughts (feelings and emotions too) and rejecting others that causes us to suffer. I know people who experience unbroken peace even in the midst of feelings the mind would normally label as sadness or anger.

The following is one of my favourite poems, written by the Sufi poet Rumi. In it he gives us clear guidance on how to deal with troublesome thoughts and feelings.

### The Guest House

This being human is a guest house  
Every morning a new arrival  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
Some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor  
Welcome and entertain them all  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows  
Who violently sweep your house  
Empty of its furniture  
Still treat each guest honourably  
He may be clearing you out for some new delight  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
Meet them at the door laughing,  
And invite them in,  
Be grateful for whoever comes,  
Because each has been sent  
As a guide from beyond. - Rumi

One of my teachers, a very joyful guy, had suffered from depression for ten years before discovering meditation. I once asked him whether he ever feels depressed these days.

He replied “Sure, the feeling still visits me from time to time”.

“Some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor  
Welcome and entertain them all  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows  
Who violently sweep your house”.

In order for us to experience ongoing peace, we need NOT first free ourselves of “the crowd of sorrows that unexpectedly visit us.” If they are met with no resistance - if we “welcome and entertain them all” - their presence need not affect our experience of peace at all.

One of the great secrets for experiencing ongoing peace and contentment is to learn to say YES to every experience, whether it is comfortable or not. Without resistance nothing sticks. The movie called “My Life|” is able to flow freely without the constant rewinding, fast-forwarding and incessant commentary that exhausts us and spoils the viewing.

Some experiences may still be uncomfortable - sadness for example. This does not mean, however, that there is anything wrong with it being there or that it needs to be healed, fixed or gone before we can experience peace.

Our labeling of certain thoughts and emotions as bad or wrong is so habitual and automatic that it doesn't occur to us to question it. And it is the labeling that causes us to suffer, not so much the condition itself. Without any mental commentary or story attached to them, emotions are simply energy in motion, possibly uncomfortable, but in themselves not a problem.

Here are some powerful questions, inspired by The Sedona Method by Hale Dwoskin. They may provide further help in dropping your resistance the next time you are confronted with challenging thoughts or emotions.

First, allow yourself to feel whatever is there in this moment. As best you can, just let it be there. Then go through the following questions. As you ask yourself each question, trust the first answer that comes to you, without thinking about it. Both yes and no are perfectly acceptable answers.

Just for now, could I simply allow this emotion to be here?

Just for now, could I let go of any attempt to understand it?

Just for now, could I let go of any wish to change or fix it?

Just for now, could I let go of any desire to be free of it?

When we offer no resistance to the thoughts or feelings that make up our inner landscape, they generally don't stick around for long. And even if they do, so long as we don't resist them being there, there is no problem.

If you find it difficult to drop your resistance to a certain pattern or emotion, you can allow that to be OK too. There is always something you can choose to drop your resistance to, even your inability to drop it.

The implications of non-resistance are huge.

We can either spend years trying to understand and heal all our issues and perceived problems **or** we can choose to fully accept them exactly as they are right now. We can either strive to experience inner peace in some future moment when more of our 'stuff' is healed **or** we can choose to experience it right now – regardless of whether 'stuff' is there or not. If you are OK with all of your perceived blemishes being there, then what is there to heal? And where is the problem?

It need take only a moment of seeing. The tiniest shift in perception can transform your life in an instant. Isn't that amazing?

I love the following quote from Thich Nhat Hanh:

“To oppose, brush aside, or deny pain in our body or mind only makes that feeling more intense. . . . Our painful feelings are no other than ourselves, or to put it more precisely, they are a part of us. To deny them is to deny our very selves. The moment we accept these feelings, we begin to feel more peaceful, and the pain begins to lose some of its intensity. To smile to our pain is the wisest, the most intelligent, the most beautiful thing we can do. There is no better way.”