



Walking the Razor's Edge, by Charlotte Joko Beck

When we aren't into our personal mischief, life is a seamless whole in which we are so embedded that there is no problem. But we don't always feel embedded because - while life is just life - when it seems to threaten our personal viewpoint we become upset, and withdraw from it. [] There are a million things that can upset human beings. They are based on the fact that suddenly life isn't just life (seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, thinking) anymore; we have separated ourselves and broken the seamless whole because we feel threatened. Now life is over there, and I am over here thinking about it. I am not embedded in it anymore. []

How do we bring our separated life together? To walk the razor's edge is to do that; we have once again to be what we basically are, which is seeing, touching, hearing, smelling; we have to experience whatever our life is, right this second. If we're upset we have to experience being upset. If we're frightened, we have to experience being frightened. If we're jealous we have to experience being jealous. And such experiencing is physical; it has nothing to do with the thoughts going on about the upset.

When we are experiencing nonverbally we are walking the razor's edge - we are the present moment. When we walk the edge the agonizing states of separateness are pulled together, and we experience perhaps not happiness but joy. []

If I feel that I've been hurt by you, I want to stay with my thoughts about the hurt. I want to experience my separation; it feels good to be consumed by those fiery, self-righteous thoughts. By thinking, I try to avoid feeling the pain. The more sophisticated my practice becomes, the more quickly I see this trap and return to experiencing the pain, the razor's edge. And where I might once have stayed upset for two years, the upset shrinks to two months, two weeks, two minutes. Eventually I can experience an upset as it happens and stay right on the razor's edge.

In fact the enlightened life is simply being able to walk that edge all the time. And while I don't know of anyone who can always do this, certainly after years of practice, we can do it much of the time. It is a joy to walk that edge.

--Charlotte Joko Beck, From "Everyday Zen"

