

The Pain & Beauty of Life Changes by Leo Babauta

The reason for our suffering is our resistance to the changes in life.

And life is all changes.

While I resist change (and suffer) just like anyone else, I have learned to adapt. I've learned some flexibility. I've realized this:

Everything changes, and this is beautiful.

The Pain of Life's Changes

What do I mean that our suffering comes from resistance to the changes in life?

Let's take a look at some things that give us trouble:

Someone yells at you at work. The change is rooted in the fact that we expect people to treat us kindly and fairly and with respect, but the reality is that they don't always. When they don't, we resist this reality, and want things to be the way we want them to be. And so we get mad, or hurt, or offended.

Your 3-year-old (or 13-year-old) won't listen to you. Again, you expect your child to behave a certain way, but of course reality is different. And when reality doesn't conform to our expectations, we are stressed out.

You lose your job. This is a huge change, that affects not only your financial stability, but your identity. If you are a teacher, and lose your teaching job, you now have to deal with the changes in how you see yourself. This can be very difficult. Resisting these changes (and the financial constraints that come with the job loss) can be very painful.

You have too many tasks and feel overwhelmed. What is the change here? We want

things to be in control, but of course they aren't. New tasks and information come in, new requests, new demands. And these are changes that are difficult, because we thought we had our day under control, and now it's not. And so we feel overwhelmed and stressed.

A loved one dies. One of the ultimate changes is death, of course, but what has changed? Well, the person is obviously no longer in our life (at least, not in the same way), but just as painfully, we are not the same person when a loved one dies. We have to change who we are — we're now a widower instead of a husband, a father without his daughter, or a friend who is left alone (for example). We want life to be the way it was, but it isn't, so we grieve, we rage.

That's just a start. Things change all the time, and we resist it. Our day changes, our relationships change, other people don't act the way they should, we ourselves are changing, constantly, and this is hard to deal with.

So this is the pain of change, of not being in control, of things not meeting our expectations.

How do we cope?

The Beauty of Life Changes

We can cope with the pain in numerous ways: get angry and yell, drink or do drugs, eat junk food, watch TV or find other distractions. We can find positive ways to cope with the stress and hurt and anger: exercise, talking about our problems with a friend, or trying to take control of the situation in some way (planning, taking action, having a difficult conversation to work out differences, etc.).

Or, we can embrace the changes.

If changes are a basic fact of life (actually life is nothing but change), then why resist? Why not embrace and enjoy?

See the beauty of change.

It's hard, because we're so used to resisting.

Let's put aside our resistance and judgments for a few minutes, and look for beauty in life's changes:

Someone yells at you at work. This person is hurting, frustrated, angry, and is taking it out on you. They are reaching out, trying to control the chaos of life (uselessly of course), and are not succeeding. Can you empathize with this? Have you ever felt this? There is beauty in our similarities, in our joint pain, in our connection as humans. Mentally embrace this beautiful, hurting human being, feel his pain, give your compassion.

Your 3-year-old (or 13-year-old) won't listen to you. Amazingly, your child is asserting her independence. She is showing that she's a full human being, not just a robot who follows orders. Have you ever been in that position? Have you ever been frustrated by someone else trying to control you? There is beauty in this independence, this fighting spirit, this rebellion. That's what life is (OK, life is change, but also rebellion against control). Smile at this beauty, love it, give your child some space to grow.

You lose your job. As difficult as this is, it's an ending, but also a beginning. It's the start of a new journey, the opportunity to refresh your life, to reinvent who you are. See the beauty in this opportunity, the liberation from the "usual way".

You have too many tasks and feel overwhelmed. This is difficult, without a doubt, but it's possible to surrender to the chaos of tasks and information and demands. You can't do them all at once, but you can let go of wanting things to be under your complete control. There is beauty in this chaos. It is random, it is crazy, it is life. See the pain of your resistance, and the beauty in this struggle as well. Then realize you can only do one thing at a time, and do that. Then let that go, and do the next thing. By embracing the chaos and seeing the beauty in it, we can be less overwhelmed and stressed out.

A loved one dies. Maybe the hardest one of all — it's indubitably sad. But death is an ending, which is a necessity. Endings are necessary for beauty: otherwise we don't appreciate the thing, because it's unlimited. Limits are beauty. And death is the ultimate limit, a reminder that we need to appreciate this beautiful thing called life while we have it. Death is also a beginning — not in the sense of an afterlife, but a beginning for the survivors. While we have lost an important person, this ending, like the loss of a job, is a moment of reinvention. It might seem sad, but we are forced to reinvent our lives when a loved one dies, and in this reinvention is opportunity. Which I think is beautiful. Finally, of course, death is an opportunity to remember the person's life, and be grateful for what they gave us.

The possibilities of finding beauty in our struggles with change are endless. And, I believe, that's beautiful in its own way.