



A Bigger Container, by Charlotte Joko Beck

We can talk about "oneness" until the cows come home. But how do we actually separate ourselves from others? How? The pride out of which anger is born is what separates us. And the solution is a practice in which we experience this separating emotion as a definite bodily state. When we do, A Bigger Container is created.

What is created, what grows, is the amount of life I can hold without it upsetting me, dominating me. At first this space is quite restricted, then it's a bit bigger, and then it's bigger still. It need never cease to grow. And the enlightened state is that enormous and compassionate space. But as long as we live we find there is a limit to our container's size and it is at that point that we must practice. And how do we know where this cut-off point is? We are at that point when we feel any degree of upset, of anger. It's no mystery at all. And the strength of our practice is how big that container gets.

As we do this practice we need to be charitable with ourselves. We need to recognize when we're unwilling to do it. No one is willing all the time. And it's not bad when we don't do it. We always do what we're ready to do.

The practice of making A Bigger Container is essentially spiritual because it is essentially nothing at all. A Bigger Container isn't a thing; awareness is not a thing; the witness is not a thing or a person. There is not somebody witnessing. Nevertheless that which can witness my mind and body must be other than my mind and body. If I can observe my mind and body in an angry state, who is this "who" who observes? It shows me that I am other than my anger, bigger than my anger, and this knowledge enables me to build A Bigger Container, to grow. So what must be increased is the ability to observe. What we observe is always secondary. It isn't important that we are upset; what is important is the ability to observe the upset.

As the ability grows first to observe, and second to experience, two factors simultaneously increase: wisdom, the ability to see life as it is (not the way I want it to be) and compassion, the natural action which comes from seeing life as it is. We can't have compassion for anyone or anything if our encounter with them is ensnared in pride and anger; it's impossible. Compassion grows as we create A Bigger Container.

