

# **SELECTED TEACHINGS OF CHARLOTTE JOKO BECK**

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## **The Four Practice Principles**

*Caught in the self-centered dream, only suffering.  
Holding to self-centered thoughts, exactly the dream.  
Each moment, life as it is, the only teacher.  
Being just this moment, compassion's way.*

### **Instructions for practice: Label Your Thoughts and Experience the Body**

#### *Experience the Body*

- Assume your best posture; attend to our alive, ongoing physical experience -- just as it is.
- Easier: Focus on one aspect such as the breath or sound. If necessary, use aids for a while (e.g., counting breaths; visualizing a ball inflating in your belly with each in-breath).

#### *Label Your Thoughts*

- Label what comes . . . and let it go. E.g., Having a thought "This is good; maybe I'm getting the hang of this meditation business." Having a thought, "I'm terrible at this."
- Notice how emotion-laden thoughts can obscure all else.

#### *Keep Returning to the Body*

- Tip: Experience the physical aspect of emotion/thought when it is present. Example: Re anger, the task is the "active experiencing, as a bodily sensation, of the anger's residue in the body, without clinging to self-centered thoughts."

#### *Notice thoughts and experience the body in everyday life*

## **Stages of Practice**

Pre-path: *Caught in the self-centered dream, only suffering.* No inkling of any other way to see life.

#### Early stages

- 1 – We become aware of feelings and internal reactions. Labeling helps. Can be painful, even shocking,
- 2 – We become able to break down emotional states into physical and mental components. (2 – 5 years)

By far the most difficult jump to make is from stage one to stage two . . . We resist doing this work because it begins to tear apart who we think we are . . . To move with any degree of solidity from stage one to stage two means that our drama slowly has to come to an end. From the standpoint of the little self, that's a tremendous sacrifice.

The hardest part, in the first 2-5-10 years, depends on your age, your strength, your genetics, how strong that early conditioning is – which can vary tremendously. There's no virtue anywhere in this, in the sense that "I'm better because I go faster" or something like that. That's nonsense.

### Middle Stages

3 – We begin to encounter moments of pure experiencing without self-centered thought. A turning takes place. We see that this isn't just psychological work. Our awareness has changed. We see what a true practice is, become committed to doing the work, and do it.

4 – We slowly move into a more consistent state of non-duality, where the basis of living is experiential instead of being dominated by false thinking. From here on, the percentage of time lived from this experiential base just increases.

### Late Stage

Emotional phenomena ensnare us much less frequently.

We begin to pick up teachings from everything our life goes through. This means the really tough ones that usually hit all of us, maybe some more than others.

Practice is not about having a life that is just nice and fun. We've seen through that. That's gone. *Each moment, life as it is, the only teacher.*

Life becomes quite different from what it used to be.

Sentences such as "I am nothing (and therefore I am everything)" are no longer meaningless phrases from some book, but things one knows intuitively. Such knowledge is nothing special or strange.

Compassion and appreciation for life and other people are much stronger. Compassion for oneself is much stronger.

I goof all over the place. What I do is fix it up, if I feel that's called for, but I don't land on myself for it. I just do what I can do. I know what I am. I'm not a person; I'm just a process that's working itself out.

*Being just this moment, compassion's way.*

### Joko's Caveat:

I don't want to imply that there's somewhere to get to. But the ability to see that there's nowhere to get to, that comes late. We're pretty determined to get somewhere.

### The Path of Practice depicted through Stories and Metaphors

#### The Mississippi River

This is a very fluid process, like the Mississippi. Some of the bends of the Mississippi go backwards, and then they go forwards. At times, in some places flood plains alter the whole river. The hard circumstances of our life alter this flow and sometimes knock us back. You go backwards as well as forwards. But you see what you never saw in the first stages, how all of that is part of it – going backwards and forwards, understanding more on some days than you understand on other days; it's all part of the life flow.

See also "The Parable of Mushin," which is the last chapter of Everyday Zen: Love & Work.

**More**

Everyday Zen: Love & Work, by Charlotte Joko Beck (1989); Nothing Special: Living Zen, by Charlotte Joko Beck (1993); Joko Beck: Short Documentary, by C. Wilke (2003) at  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=py0exdNnvBM>.