

SKATING ON THIN ICE

Many days life might seem quite good. Or at least it doesn't seem awful. It's like we're skating on the ice - the momentum of life almost carries us along on automatic pilot. But even when we're gliding along, something inside of us knows that we're ignoring things that we'll ultimately have to face. Yet we still glide along, even knowing that the ice is thin.

When our life seems worse, when we start actually encountering the cracks in the thin ice, what do we do? Naturally, we try to clean up the ice - making our usual efforts to push away or overcome our difficulties. Often we just try to skate around the cracks - by either ignoring or suppressing our painful reactions to life.

It is an unfortunate fact that for most of us it takes falling through the ice for us to really look at our situation. We often have to fall right into the icy water, unable to move or breathe, overwhelmed and drowning, before we're forced to really deal with the deeply seated conditioning which runs our life - all of the hidden landmines of anger, fear, and confusion. It often takes a severe illness, a major financial upset, a relationship failure, or the death of someone close to us, to wake us up to our situation, to force us to reside in that icy water.

But even when we learn from these major upsets, we often go right back to gliding on the thin ice as soon as we get ourselves back on our feet. Perhaps we know a little about that particular hole, but what about the rest of the cracks in the ice? How can we begin to learn from these cracks - our upsets, our mood swings, our efforts to protect, defend, push away - all of our disappointments? What is required?

What is required is the gradual but fundamental change in our perspective on how we meet our difficulties. First must come the understanding that whenever we're having an emotional reaction to life, it means that we surely have some belief system in place that we haven't yet looked at deeply enough. This understanding is not just intellectual; it gradually becomes our basic orientation to life. We no longer look to someone or something outside of ourselves to blame for our reaction - we simply look less and less at justifying our stuff, and more and more at just wanting to experience what it is. And this leads to the second aspect of the fundamental change in our perspective - the realization that whenever we have any emotional upset, we can welcome it as our wake up call, our signal, our opportunity to look at something that we haven't yet seen, something that can help us to learn to become more open to life as it is.

Whether we ever begin to really learn from our disappointments, from all of the cracks in the ice, is the key issue in practice. Sooner or later we have to face what we have to face; and this can only come with this gradual yet fundamental change in our orientation to life, toward a willingness to see, to learn, to practice with everything we meet. We don't have to wait until we're drowning.