

What is Really Going On Right Now?

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Most of us have been sitting long enough to know that keeping practice at the forefront of our lives is the most valuable thing we can do for ourselves, our families, and our communities especially in a time of crisis. Yet even when we know this in our heart, it is important to stay alert to how much of our day is spent trying to convince ourselves it isn't necessary. The conditioned mind is more than willing to provide a carnival ride of tantalizing detours and we might find ourselves forgetting to ask the ever so basic question, *What is going on right now?* And if we do remember to ask the question, very often a quick check in with discomfort in our physical/emotional state leaves us eager to stay distracted rather than going to the next most important step of remembering to actually *feel this!*

Sometimes we convince ourselves that we are really just too busy to pause (even when our calendar is empty) or we find ourselves setting our own daily schedule with sitting practice as the last resort at the end of the day. After all, there is so much we need to accomplish! If our work life isn't asking us to take care of things, certainly our friends and family relationships are calling to us. Or if we are living alone in this time of pandemic our own personal anxiety may be feeding an emotional fatigue that can convince us that the most important task at hand is to catch up on our sleep. Or disinfect something again.

But in this need to satisfy the demands of our spinning mind, are we noticing where we are putting awareness in the order of things? Are we giving awareness top priority in our life or letting it come forward as a last resort?

NOW is a most valuable time to put our aspiration at the forefront and let it guide us gently toward awareness. Let accomplishment (and sleepiness) take a distant second place for a change. After all, is there an accomplishment that is not better served when completed with awareness? *I can't think of a single one.* So why do we resist awareness? We know awareness heals, but we also know that when we stop resisting awareness we are going to open the door to feeling our own vulnerability, uncertainty, and fear. All of those uncomfortable experiences that we don't want to be necessary will no longer be denied.

It touches my heart, how hard we humans keep trying in our own ways to hang on to the surface of these turbulent waters and do anything we can to keep from sinking into the reality of feeling this moment. As if it was possible to just walk away from select parts of ourselves. But what if instead of trying to hang on to the surface of pandemic life, we found the courage to dive in willingly instead? What actually happens when we decide to *be curious about this especially muddy water?* What happens when instead of using practice as a last resort, we bring it to the forefront?

Just in asking the question "*what is going on right now?*" we are beginning that precious journey toward the relief of wide open awareness. Just by asking the question we are allowing ourselves to recognize that there is no mistake. Our life is not a mistake. We are not being punished. And the evidence is everywhere that it isn't even just us this time! We are not alone. We don't have to stay stuck in guilt and unworthiness. We can let our aspiration provide the courage to explore our experience of turbulence in this life and let compassion for our own human vulnerability be the warm and soft blanket that provides the comfort that we need to continue with an open heart.

In the reading On Love, Jacob Nudelman speaks to the place where love already exists, within me and you, whether we notice it or not. In order to realize this in times of difficulty perseverance is always required and is by its very nature difficult. But we don't need to leave compassion behind because we are committed to persevering.

Compassionate perseverance allows us to find the courage to gently take another look, feel another tender spot, and open to our best ability in the moment. From this place of compassion we can not only find relief from our own suffering, but we can also begin to offer compassion to others as we recognize their pain as our own in this shared experience of life as it is.