

Centering Meditation

Allow yourself to arrive here. Let your self rest in the sense of safety and benevolence of this gathering. Gently let go of the day, all the activity, all the movements and feelings and thoughts and concerns. Let yourself be present here, in this place, in this moment. Settle into the being held in the peacefulness of this gathering, in this moment. Become aware of being in your body, feeling your back and your butt on the chair or couch, feeling your feet on the floor, relax your eyes, your jaw, your throat. Be present and open to this experience of sitting, breathing. Settle into an awareness of your breathing, gently breathing in and out. Let your awareness settle on your breathing.

When your awareness of being in this moment, here, now, steadies, bring in any sense of gratitude or appreciation that helps you open into a sense of ease, well-being, contentment. Notice any feelings of warmth, openness, relaxation in your body, and let yourself savor a moment of goodness.

If any distracting thoughts or feelings arise, simply acknowledge them, let them in, let them be, and then let them move through and return your awareness to a sense of goodness, ease, well-being.

If distracting thoughts continue to arise, evoke a sense of compassion for yourself in this moment, how hard it is to be a human being. And return your awareness to your breath, to a sense of goodness.

Dharma Talk: Finding Joy in Difficult Times

This month's theme is finding joy in difficult times, but it's not really about difficult times, it's about our response to difficult times, which is do we respond skillfully in ways that don't cause additional suffering, the second dharma. James, not about looking for difficulties but allowing all experience in, and when it's hard experience, practicing being with it in a wise non-resisting way, a little bit at a time. Continue to practice intention, mindfulness and gratitude to awaken wholesome states, then we can respond in ways that keep the heart open. That are not afraid of the suffering when it comes, and that use difficulties as an opportunity to grow the heart bigger and make the mind steadier and lead to the acceptance of suffering which helps lead to the release or the end of suffering.

The chapter in the book focuses on suffering. The Buddha focused on suffering and the end of suffering. Dealing with suffering is a really important part of spiritual practice, because when we're experiencing suffering or caught in suffering it seems so real. It seems this IS what's real, and then we try to move thorough the 8-fold path: wise understanding, wise intention, wise effort, wise mindfulness, wise concentration, wise livelihood, wise speech, wise action to end suffering.

Also to end the confusion, the delusion, that the suffering is what's real. But in Buddhist view, suffering is conditional, part of the human condition, part of all existence, because there is old age, sickness and death. In all of life there is loss. And unless we can come to terms with loss, with impermanence, we suffer. When we can be equanimous in the face of loss and impermanence, we don't suffer.

I actually want to teach on this theme of suffering and finding joy in the midst of it from a different angle, also very Buddhist, that what is real is not the conditioned but the Unconditioned. The Ground of Being, the Beingness that all existence arises out of and passes away into, the emptiness that all form arises out of and passes away into. The Sanskrit term Satchitananda: the consciousness that is aware of itself is bliss. That our true Buddha nature, our True Nature, IS calm, contented, conscious, compassionate.

That if we can experience and embody the calm tranquility, the ease and well-being of our True Nature, then suffering arises in the midst of that and can be held in the spacious awareness of that. (I Am That)

James focuses on mindfulness as the key practice to hold suffering in spacious container of awareness, to inquire into it with a compassionate awareness, to allow it and to move through it without grasping or aversion or confusion.

I would add, and I know James would too, because I've studied with him for ten years, it's experience of awareness of our True Nature, our Buddha Nature, that allows us to mindfully hold, process and allow us to move through our suffering.

This wisdom understanding is corroborated by modern neuropsychology – that when we are resourced with enough reflective awareness and empathic acceptance, we can bring to awareness and inquire into and allow to move through ANY emotional pain or trauma, any mental anguish or trauma, any confusion and heal, end our suffering.

So the exercises we will do later to end suffering, and to find joy in the midst of it, begin with the resources of joy, happiness, well-being, contentment, because that's what actually works to mindfully dissolve suffering.

We do lots of practices to awaken joy, to discover our True Nature, Brahma Viharas, loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, but once we even briefly tap into the sense of home that is our True Nature, the profound sense that everything is OK, not that everything is going to be OK, but that everything IS OK, then that becomes the anchor or platform to hold and work with everything else that is not OK.

I want to offer a different vocabulary for the trajectory of dealing with suffering that James presented in the book and in the course. James suggested Michele McDonald's RAIN: Recognize, Allow, Investigate, Non-Identify. I find it easier to work with: Three P's: presence processing, and perspective.

1. **PRESENCE** is dropping into presence, felt sense of being here, in this moment, dropping below the level of the story, and even below the emotions to a felt sense of being in this body, finding a place in the body that is calm, not agitated, maybe your elbow, or big toe. Then acknowledging and allowing what we experience arising in the moment to be, as it is. Letting it in to our awareness, letting it be with acceptance, not fixing, not avoiding, not denying, it IS. When we are not so vigilant, so on guard, first step moving from contention with life to consenting to life to contentment with life. Allows us to , not avoid suffering, but to understand it deeply. Then..

2. **PROCESSING**: step of being compassionate and curious.

a. as we are aware of being aware and being compassionate for ourselves for what we are going through, and whatever we are experiencing as we go through it, we stay aware and compassionate as we bring up chunks of difficult experience.

b. Important to unpack experience of suffering into small enough chunks to make it workable, titrated enough to be manageable and

a. Important to unpack experience of suffering into small enough chunks to make it workable.

I had a chance to practice this. All well and good to enter into a state of relaxed mindfulness – to be present, aware of moment to moment experience, aware of being aware – when I was sitting quietly on a meditation cushion with 50 other people all sitting quietly on their meditation cushions. Not so easy to maintain that calm awareness when I was in the push and shove of the “real” world again.

The same afternoon I left my first retreat, in fact, I found myself getting into a very spiritually incorrect snit because all the washers in the local laundromat were full when I wanted to do post-retreat laundry on the way home. It took less than a minute to stir myself into a full snarl of “why can’t people do their laundry some other time!!” before I could remember to take a moment, to pause, perceive, reflect: all the washers were being used because a local girl scout troop had just come out of camp and two of the mothers were valiantly trying to cope with two weeks’ worth of laundry for 27 ten-year olds.

I could have gone on home from that moment of “waking up” in a less cantankerous but still slightly disappointed funk, when one of the mothers graciously found me an empty washer in the back. Getting to do my laundry after all gave me a chance to notice my emerging chagrin at my self-absorption, and the time to get curious and explore what had just happened, and why, over nothing!

As I put my clothes in the washer, I reflected back on that instant of “Oh no!” that started the chain reaction. Not even a full thought, just “Oh no! I can’t do what I want here!” And my next-to-instant response after that – a flare of resentment at someone else’s laundry getting in my way. So whoa! Since when do I have the right to get angry

just because someone else has needs, too, and I might have to wait my turn? What's this anger at feeling thwarted?

By the time my clothes hit the first spin cycle, I was beginning to see how often I do get angry when I feel thwarted. Road rage at traffic stopped on the highway when I'm already late to work. A pissy moment when the store where I always buy fresh pasta has run out; now I have to go all the way to another store to get what I want (as though that's a hardships in a world where 10% of women have to walk 3 miles to get drinking water every day!)

By the time my clothes had gone through the second rinse and spin cycle, I was noticing my pattern of experiencing an instant flare of anger at thwart as a pattern. I respond to thwart with anger a lot. It's a deeply conditioned and often unconscious response by now. Nobody else even has to be involved except as a catalyst to my own reactivity.

As I moved my clothes from the washer to the dryer I was on my way to seeing that any pattern of response is a pattern. By the time my clothes were dry and ready to fold, I could let go of exploring the pattern for the time being and return to the simple calm awareness I had experienced while on retreat.

c. go back and forth; pendulate between difficulty I'm focusing on, and here's the awareness and compassion that's helping me hold it. Focus on it; here's the chunk of difficulty again, here's the awareness and compassion that's holding it James' examples from the book, fear of retinal tear, grief at loss of dog Pal.

d. Or, here's the difficulty, and gratitude practice or a kindness practice to help us remember what else there also is.

e. Box in chapter, p. 108: importance of labeling, if we can name suffering the naming the word keeps the frontal lobe of the cortex on line, making us much less vulnerable to an emotional hijack. Doesn't change or fix anything, just keeps our awareness on line so we can work skillfully.

Teaching story: Guy Armstrong was sitting a long retreat himself, his settling into the silence disturbed at first by a vague, troubling, nagging something-or-other he couldn't quite put his finger on. After sitting/wrestling with his experience for several days, up bubbled up the dawning awareness, Oh! This is despair!" The simple naming of the experience, acknowledging it without judgment or moving to fix it, allowed Guy's mind to settle into quite a peaceful serene state, holding the despair compassionately when needed, resting in spacious awareness otherwise. Same if we create a map of our mental patterns, as I did at the laundromat

Naming keeps the awareness going so we can handle the fear or shame or pain arising in the moment. James, in other teaching, not this chapter, says his favorite tool of mindfulness to work with suffering is "What story am I believing now?"

f. Then, when our mindfulness is steady, we are pendulating – resource – difficulty, resource – difficulty and labeling, it's safe enough to actually feel our feelings, which means feeling the body sensations that are the signals of the emotions. We can feel the electric buzz of anxiety in our chest or the tight jaw of suppressed anger or the collapse of the chest of rejection or shame. With awareness, the sensation moves through. James telling stories in the book of letting wave after wave of fear course through his body when he heard he had a torn retina and might be blind, or wave after wave of grief flow though as his dog Pal was dying.

This can be called letting go, but I find it easier to think of letting it all move through, because the pain of the suffering can arise again and move through again. It doesn't have to go away; we just have to be not stuck. As visceral experience of suffering moves through, and we return to a baseline of calm, can drop the story, or change the story of what's happening. Example quoted in AJ book on coming to terms with cancer, coming to terms with death.

p. 98: We often think that being healed means the illness and pain will go away. But healing does not necessarily mean that the physical body will mend...Healing is not just about physical symptoms. Many people heal and still remain physically sick or even die. Many who become physically well never really heal. Healing involved clearing the pathway to the open heart – the hear that knows only connectedness...To heal, to become whole, means we no longer identify with ourselves as just this body, as just our suffering. We identify with a vaster sense of being. Ezra Bayda, Being Zen.

3. **PERSPECTIVE.** When suffering is met with mindfulness, compassionately, skillfully, then new perspectives arise.

a. one is, even if it is loss, impermanence that causes most of our suffering and grief, suffering and grief are also impermanent (unless we're stuck, and we do get stuck: James earlier in book, as long as we re mindful we cannot stay stuck) We begin to see that any moment is not every moment, any experience is not all experience, whatever is happening now is not going to happen forever. We can perceive moments of peace or OKness in the midst of the suffering. This makes the suffering seem less solid. In this wisdom, impermanence itself can become a comfort.

b. With enough mindfulness, enough compassion, we begin to see that my pain is THE pain of the human condition. Everyone suffers loss, everyone suffers anguish. We re not unique and we are not alone. If we can keep our heart open to our suffering, we become bigger. We open our hearts to universal suffering.

You're probably familiar with this teaching story in the Buddhist tradition: A young mother in a small village was completely bereft at the sudden death of her 8 year old son. She desperately ran through the village looking for anyone who could bring him back to life. A neighbor directed her to a monk living on the outskirts of the village who

reassured her that, indeed, he could bring her son back to life if she brought him a mustard seed from any house in the village that had never known death.

Excitedly, the woman ran from door to door with her request for a mustard seed. But at each house she heard, “No, sorry, our uncle died last week.” Or “No, sorry, my wife died last year.” Finally the woman came to realize that her household was no different than any other household in the village. Every person in the village had suffered the loss of someone near and dear to them. Pain and suffering are universal to being human.

When we can re-frame our pain as the pain of being human, feel the pain fully but not take it personally, then we come into the larger perspective, the larger awareness, that pain and suffering are an inevitable part of human existence. We realize we are not the only ones who have to cope with what we never asked for and never wanted. As real and overwhelming as our pain might be, we can move beyond “Why me?” to “What now?” We face the unknown, as everyone must, from our own inner wisdom of acceptance and compassion. Indeed, our own suffering becomes the gateway to humbly become a compassionate refuge for others.

An excerpt from the poem Kindness by Naomi Shihab Nye:

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
 You must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
 You must wake up with sorrow.
 You must speak to it till your voice
 catches the thread of all sorrows
 and you see the size of the cloth.

c. Suffering then catalyst for growth. Most of us drawn to practice because of suffering. That's the grace of suffering.

From Sri Aurobindo (founder of CIIS): “You carry within yourself all the obstacles necessary to make your realization perfect. If you discover a very black hole, a thick shadow, you can be sure there is somewhere in you a great light. It is up to you to know how to use the one to realize the other.”

And this story from *How We Choose To Be Happy*, the book by Rick Foster and Greg Hicks that was the text for the *Awakening Joy* course before James and Shoshana wrote their book:

Within a two year period, Adele's parents died, skyrocketing rents forced her business into bankruptcy, her husband left her for another woman, her house burned to the ground in the Oakland hills fire, and her beloved dog died.

“As my initial shock began to clear, a feeling that I wanted to live outweighed all of my thoughts about death. I began to see there was hope among the ashes. There was

one big opportunity – I had a clean slate. I wanted to feel whole. I was sure that I wanted to embrace everything in life – the good and the bad. As long as I had to start over and create a whole new life, I was going to create a happy one.”

Adele cried a lot. When she felt empty, she meditated. When she felt unsure, she called a friend to talk about what she was going through. She joined a support group for women. She poured out her heart in un-mailed letters to her mom, dad, and ex-husband. And, stripped down to essentials, to her real self, she began building a more authentic life for herself.

Adele re-framed losing every external support she had as an opportunity to draw on her own resilient resources within. “What I never had before was self-knowledge. Now, I know myself. I know my limits, my emotional range, my loves. And I know I can build a life around those things. What I have now [thriving catering business, a serene “tree house” home in the Berkeley hills, warm, intimate friendships] is a life that reflects the real me!”

d. Suffering can bring us to explore, pull for, something larger than ourselves. Suffering can open us to more compassion, more inter-connectedness, more courage, more wisdom than we knew we had. THAT is the joy, not just in s the midst. James examples of joy in the midst – a breath without pain, sunshine on our skin, child’s smile, bird’s song. Skillful means to break up the suffering into something less solid. But this is the joy around the suffering. Joy, ease, well-being that is larger than any suffering.

This is the deep joy the practices of this course aim for and cultivate. A deep sense of appreciation, delight, contentment, ease, that is always available any moment we are present, open, aware, because it IS our True Nature, our true home. Let no ripple of thought disturb this peace of mind. We open again to the miraculousness of existence, no matter what is going on, and there can be a lot going on.

Joy No Matter What by Carolyn Hobbs
 Happy for No Reason by Marci Shimoff
 Dancing with Life: by Phillip Moffitt
 The Art of Happiness by the Dalai Lama

Joy larger than life and death, larger than gain and loss, joy of the unconditioned.

Experiential Exercises to Work with Difficulties

How to have Wise Effort, skillful means in dealing with suffering and cultivating a deepening joy.

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved....All the world is full of suffering. It is also full of overcoming.” – Helen Keller

“It’s all about putting in the baby steps. That’s really the key – repeating your intention, sitting through the hard stuff consciously when it happens, staying inside the good stuff for longer periods and really appreciating it, practicing loving-kindness for yourself, not becoming discouraged or impatient, and then getting up tomorrow and staring all over again.” – Paula, course participant.

1. **PRESENCE**: We practice presence in meditation. And we resource our meditation with gratitude, compassion, equanimity, trust before processing our suffering.

a. **Practicing Presence**

Sit, focus in, let awareness arise: I’m in this body, I can feel my butt, my feet, I relax my jaw. I’m aware of my breath. Precious breath, precious moment. Be open and grateful for this sense of presence, here now. Let arise a remembrance of a moment of gratitude; recall, image, feeling in body. Some moment of trust. Moment of equanimity. Set intention to anchor awareness in this experience of True Nature as we move through processing of suffering.

2. **PROCESSING**

a. **Working with Suffering Directly**

Choose a very small moment of suffering to work with. Establish your own mindfulness. Aware of sitting here, working with partner, what you’re choosing to work with. Establish a sense of well-being, of safety and trust in our True Nature, or faith in process. Create a Loving presence to do this process in. Share with partner. Label or name of suffering. Not a lot of story or history, name the experience as you recall the suffering. Describe feelings or sensation in body now as you remember this suffering. Stay mindful and notice; be present with you’re experience as it is. The awareness that is aware of fear is not itself afraid. The awareness that is aware of anger is not itself angry. Stay compassionate. It is hard being a human being! Stay curious; how is my experience changing as I process and track? 3 minutes each.

b. **Distraction**

Distraction can be deliberately doing something else rather than processing suffering. Simply to break the grip of the suffering on our awareness. To make the suffering less solid. This morning a client called me in distress while I was at the vet and the receptionist overheard me take the call and said afterwards – call them back and tell them to get out of the environment they’re in, find the most beautiful place they can to take a walk, extrovert themselves, look at the beauty there are walking in, and get the bigger picture. So I did. It reminded me of a friend coping with financial collapse, went for a walk, came back, that was the most peaceful half hour I have ever spent in my entire life. Go for a walk or a hike or a bike ride. Take a shower, cook a meal, do the laundry, focus on something else for 20 minutes and then come back to suffering. Do come back! Not

denial or avoidance, just taking a breather. Learned from Yvonne Rand, make an appointment, 2pm Friday, and keep it, but get to live life in the meantime.

c. **Shifting states**

Shifting states is using a resource like gratitude or compassion to break the grip the suffering has on our attention. Disappointment, criticism – compassion!

In three's, explore in a dialogue some resources of distraction and shifting states you have used. What resources are favorites or seem most reliable.

d. **Reach out for refuge and resource**

Use wise friends, support groups, meditation groups, therapy, to spiritual figure or teacher, your own Wiser Self or Wise Guide. “True friends are the ones who know the song of your heart and hum it back to you when you’ve forgotten the words.” – Galloway Quena via Shoshana Alexander. Compulsive self reliance or withdrawal/isolation can be the second dart of our suffering. It’s fine to be in solitude on retreat, do your own journaling, your own processing but stay engaged, connected with people or sense of divine. I’m not alone. I don’t have to know everything. I don’t have to do it all myself. Great example - Healing Journeys conference – cancer. Know your list of your “go to” people that you can turn to any time the challenges of life pile up to the point of overwhelm. Short list of people you can call at 2am.

Share in large groups examples of refuges or resources.

e. **Inner Child Work**

James suggested very briefly inner child work, which is essential for most of us to do to fully heal our suffering. Much suffering is fueled by past hurt, rejection, trauma. I want to propose a way to zero in on one piece of healing past trauma, incorporating what I’ve learned from an article by Bruce Ecker in the Jan-Feb. Psychotherapy Networker about the Brain’s Rules for Change. The mechanism of processing and dissolving trauma in implicit memory is when we recall a sliver of trauma memory; remember feelings, in body of that memory, so neural networks light up. Recall a different memory that contradicts or disconfirms first memory. Get body sensations of that. Hold both memories in your awareness at same time – process called deconsolidation reconsolidation – synapses of memory will unlock, deconsolidate very briefly and then reconsolidate together, yes neurons that fire together wire together, synaptic connection change and then returns to long term storage changed. If second disconfirming memory is positive, is awash with neurochemicals of feeling safe or calm or happy – the new experience will pair and trump the original trauma memory, dissolves it immediately and permanently.

Do exercise to practice that. First, evoke memory of ease, well-being, of safety, trust, strength, vitality. Then bring small moment of suffering into that larger field. Hold both memories in awareness simultaneously. Notice what happens next.

3. **PERSPECTIVE**

Mindfulness helps us experience over and over and over that whatever is happening in the moment is only one thing in one moment.

p. 97. When my ninety-five-year-old father was ill and dying, my grief was overwhelming. I felt exhausted, found it difficult to be with people and to keep my commitments. With mindfulness practice I came to see that the grief “had me”. It had taken over my entire life. I saw that I could allow the grief and be fully with it whenever it came up, but that there were the other moments of the day when it wasn’t there. This allowed me to “have” the grief as well as be present in the moment with whatever else was there. I have since felt light, had more energy, and am once again engaged in my life.

- course participant.

We must have that perspective to deal with suffering. James has taught me: No ripple of thought is worth disturbing this peace of mind. Otherwise we drown in it.

a. **Larger perspective**

In three’s, share something difficult that is going on right now and the joys or delights that you can find in the midst of it, around it, larger than it. What is the larger perspective you can move out to? Two minutes each.

Mindfulness also allows us to see how we are responding to our suffering – present, open, accepting, processing, or are we reactive, angry, shutting down, blaming, denying. With Mindfulness we can see, and we can care, and we can choose which we will practice a lot in these exercises.

Once we open our perspective to a larger view, a wiser view, we can not just learn the lessons to redeem the suffering, though that’s helpful and we learnt to do that – we can let go of identifying with the suffering as ours personally or that it shouldn’t be happening, ours or somebody else.

Closing Meditation

Knowing that the Buddha taught: the first noble truth is the recognition that suffering and difficulty are interwoven into the very fabric of human existence, and that he taught the 8-fold path as a path of liberation from that suffering - May we become skillful in our effort to face and work with the difficulties in our own lives, in the lives of those near and dear to us. May our sincere efforts lead us through the suffering to a deeper recognition of the joy available at any moment – no matter what.

Homework

1. Practice mindfulness regularly as you go through your day-to-day so that the habit of mindfulness shows up automatically when you are thrown for a loop.
2. Practice resourcing yourself with kindness, compassion, gratitude, equanimity, as you go through your day-to-day, so that these resources, this anchoring in your True Nature, shows up automatically when you are thrown for a loop.
3. Unpack the experience of suffering into smaller chunks. De-couple the content or story or beliefs from the waves of emotion from the bodily sensations. Focus your awareness only on the body sensation until they loosen up and move through.
4. For any moment of upset, agitation, pain, grief, step back and name what is happening. Keep your higher brain on line so you can hold, discern, and choose wisely.
5. Stay connect with trustworthy friends, colleagues, family, teachers, a sense of the divine or your Wiser Self. It's OK to be vulnerable and share; it keeps you from getting stuck.
6. Follow the thread of your own pain and suffering to the bigger picture. Who else do you know who is also experiencing a similar suffering or has in the past? Who else on the planet?
7. Remember moments when this suffering was/ is not here. Last year? Last week? This morning? Right now, is anything else also happening that is not suffering? Let the impermanence of the suffering itself be a comfort.

Resources for Finding Joy in Difficult Times

Kindness

Before you know what kindness really is
 You must lose things,
 feel the future dissolve in a moment
 like salt in a weakened broth.
 What you held in your hand,
 what you counted and carefully saved,
 all this must go so you know
 how desolate the landscape can be
 between the regions of kindness.
 How you ride and ride
 thinking the bus will never stop,
 the passengers eating maize and chicken
 will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
 you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
 lies dead by the side of the road.
 You must see how this could be you,
 how he too was someone
 who journeyed through the night with plans
 and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
 you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
 You must wake up with sorrow.
 You must speak to it till your voice
 catches the thread of all sorrows
 and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes any sense anymore,
 only kindness that ties your shoes
 and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
 only kindness that raises its head from the crowd of that world to say
 it is I you have been looking for,
 and then goes with you everywhere
 like a shadow or a friend.

- Naomi Shahib Nye

A Brief for the Defense

Sorrow everywhere. Slaughter everywhere. If babies
 are not starving someplace, they are starving
 somewhere else. With flies in their nostrils.
 But we enjoy our lives because that's what God wants.
 Otherwise the mornings before summer dawn would not
 be made so fine. The Bengal tiger would not
 be fashioned so miraculously well. The poor women
 at the fountain are laughing together between
 the suffering they have known and the awfulness
 in their future, smiling and laughing while somebody
 in the village is very sick. There is laughter
 every day in the terrible streets of Calcutta,
 and the women laugh in the cages of Bombay.
 If we deny our happiness, resist our satisfaction,
 we lessen the importance of their deprivation.
 We must risk delight. We can do without pleasure,
 but not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have
 the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless

furnace of this world. To make injustice the only
 measure of our attention is to praise the Devil.
 If the locomotive of the Lord runs us down,
 we should give thanks that the end had magnitude.
 We must admit there will be music despite everything.
 We stand at the prow again of a small ship
 anchored late at night in the tiny port
 looking over to the sleeping island: the waterfront
 is three shuttered cafés and one naked light burning.
 To hear the faint sound of oars in the silence as a rowboat
 comes slowly out and then goes back is truly worth
 all the years of sorrow that are to come.

- Jack Gilbert, Refusing Heaven

The Buddhist teachings are fabulous at simply working with what's happening as your path of awakening, rather than treating your life experiences as some kind of deviation from what is supposed to be happening. The more difficulties you have, in fact, the greater opportunity there is to let them transform you. The difficult things provoke all your irritations and bring your habitual patterns to the surface. And that becomes the moment of truth. You have the choice to launch into the lousy habitual patterns you already have, or to stay with the rawness and discomfort of the situation and let it transform you, on the spot. – Pema Chodren

There is a brokenness out of which comes the unbroken,
 A shatteredness out of which blooms the unshatterable.
 There is sorrow beyond all grief which leads to joy,
 And a fragility out of whose depths emerges strength.
 There is a hollow space too vast for words
 Through which we pass with each loss,
 Out of whose darkness we are sanctioned into being.
 There is a cry deeper than all sound
 Whose serrated edges cut the heart as we break open
 To the place inside which is unbreakable and whole,
 While learning to sing.

- Rashani

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