

What Matters: Suffering is optional

by: Philip Urso

I recently had an experience that showed me how to end suffering. For years in yoga class, I hated a certain pose called Wheel. I finally admitted this to myself and accepted it.

My next time taking a class, I noticed the dreadful anticipation as Wheel pose approached. I decided to pay no attention to it. Instead I focused intently on what was real. I said to myself: "I am in a pose. I have sensation. I have the sound of my breath. Anything I add to this mentally is defined as suffering."

I focused my attention on the sensation and on my breath. I gave the mental drama no energy. Two things happened: First, it was just sensation. I looked at it as it was. It was nothing compared to what I had dreaded it to be. My dread of the pose was the suffering. The reality was that the sensation was uncomfortable, but as I looked at it carefully, I could feel it changing. As I looked directly at it without compromise, I could feel changes in temperature, shifts in the sensation. As I looked directly at it, I realized that I was experiencing it for the first time. As I looked directly at it, I began to feel the peace that comes from being present. In the past, I never looked directly at the reality of the pose. I spent all my energy dreading it and avoiding it and fighting it. I spent my energy making-up, in my mind alone, the illusion of suffering.

Second, I immediately improved in the pose. For years I was stuck in that pose and suddenly, amazingly, my Wheel pose improved. Then it got easier. Then I started enjoying it. Then I was faced with a very big issue: What other parts of my life did I dread? Where else had I chosen to suffer? And as a result, where else in my life was I stuck?

So now I pay attention. Whenever I feel dread or even the slightest unease, it's like an alarm going off. I ask myself, "Why can't I accept the reality of this moment? What is real, right now?"

Whatever pose I am in, husband, father, son, at work or at play, if I feel unease, dread or outright anger, I realize that I am not accepting the reality before me. I am at war with this moment. Like wheel, this moment may be uncomfortable, but the suffering is always optional.

My suffering at wheel did not make me better at wheel. Just the opposite. It held me stuck. No progress, no growth, no happiness. I paid a price to keep my suffering. A Course in Miracles says it this way, "Pain is the price we gladly pay not to be free."

We pay dearly for the option of suffering. We set ourselves apart from reality. We give up any chance of the happiness. We give up any chance of powerful creativity, and we give up any chance of progress. As I continue this practice in the poses of my life, I notice that I am more present. I notice that my relationships are improving, and I am

enjoying life more.

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