



THE POWER OF ACCEPTANCE Letting Go of “Should”

By Catherine Dowling

I’ve always hated wearing shoes. If I could wear flip flops all year round, I would. Every year I hold out as long as possible but around the end of October I begin to wonder why my lower legs are stiff with cold. Then I bow to the inevitable and break out the shoes.

And so it is with life. We can spend long periods of our life--years, even decades--resisting what is, refusing to accept the reality that presents itself to us every day. That reality can be as simple as the need to wear shoes before frostbite threatens to take away our toes. Or it can be something as life changing as the need to end a relationship that does not and will not work. More importantly perhaps, resistance to reality can take the form of shutting out the abundance of joy and love that life can offer us every day.

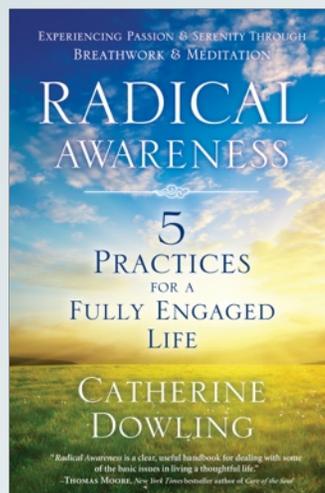
Why do we resist reality? Well, reality is often not what we want it to be. Or even more telling, not what we think it should be. We often grow up with “shoulds”. Children “should” behave themselves, parents “should” be more understanding, I “should” be tall and slim.

Resistance to what is serves a useful purpose. It’s an important stage of bereavement, for example, particularly if our loved one died before their time. In the early stages of mourning, we often tell ourselves, “It’s not fair. It just shouldn’t be!” Denying the reality of deep loss protects us against the full brunt of our pain until we’re ready to face it. In daily life, resistance to what is, our “shoulds,” protects us against any fear we may have of change, fear of a future that is different and often unknown.

But our “shoulds” can also keep us stuck. While we focus on what should or should not be, it’s difficult to identify possibilities that might be waiting for us just around the corner. While I focus on how I “should” be 20 lbs. lighter, I can miss the fun of the party I don’t go to because nothing fits anymore, or the appreciative gaze of an admirer I might have met at that party, had I gone to it.

Life is full of possibilities, most of them currently not visible. And many of them don’t come into our life until we face what’s already there, until we accept what is. When we accept reality, we can begin to channel our creative energy away from resistance and into openness. When we accept what is, we can begin to clear a space and prepare ourselves for the abundance life offers just as soon as we are ready to receive it.

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