

Three Lists Around Expectations/Requirements

The following exercise originates from Charlotte Joko Beck's teachings. If you've never engaged in it, you might find it useful. Even if you have done it before, it can be revealing to do another sweep through now and then. Take your time with it, generating the first list over a week or more, returning to it and adding more as you remember.

It can be helpful to bring in your lists and any questions or concerns you have to daisan.

List One: What was expected or required of you as a child? What were all the things your parents, relatives, teachers, friends, and others expected you to be, do, and have? What was required from you by the culture, society, and the very times and places you lived in, etc. Make this list as particular and specific as your memory allows.

List Two: What are your expectations or requirements of yourself now, as an adult? When in your life did they begin? Pay special attention to how the items on list one were carried forward, absorbed, internalized, possibly modified, transformed, or even rebelled against. It's likely this list will be shorter but, again, make it as specific and particular as you can.

List Three: Given the expectations that were laid on you as a child and internalized and/or rebelled against as a teenager and adult, what are some of the specific manifestations of negative emotion that are connected to the items on your second list? For example, if you'd been expected to always clean up your room as a child, and if you still keep your space neat, you may have some residual anger or resentment about that underneath the surface. Even today, as a so-called freely functioning adult, whenever it's time to clean up your space, a little vague irritation might appear. You might even feel irritated in the presence of someone else's neat space.

Now, to bring practice to bear on these lists, whenever you feel any negative emotion—anger, irritation, resentment, depression, etc., you can ask yourself, "What am I expecting of myself, or what am I requiring of myself?" (Usually one of your items on the second list). And then, once you answer that, practice is to go to the actual raw feelings in the body and be willing to experience them directly, just as they are. Make no mistake, this can be quite uncomfortable at times, especially if earlier painful events have been brought up in memory.

Working with the emotions around the expectations or requirements we have of ourselves can be a powerful way to see through the conditioning and reactivity

we've built up over the years, gradually lessening their influence over us and opening up some space for simple being, natural kindness, and effective problem solving.