

The Way Things Are

The Zanders describe The Ways Things Are as a way of looking at present circumstances exactly as they are without resisting them especially when they are unpleasant circumstances. They describe it as “being present without resistance”.

“The practice of being with *the way things are* calls upon us to distinguish between our assumptions, our feelings, and the facts – that is, what has happened or is happening. These are not easy distinctions to make considering the ongoing inventive power of perception.” So here are some applications of this practice to help us distinguish our thoughts and feelings about events from the events themselves.

Being with the Way Things Are by Clearing “Shoulds”

When we don’t like a situation, we tend to think about how things should be instead. Directing our attention primarily to how wrong things are, we lose our power to act effectively.

Being with the Way Things are by Closing the Exits : Escape, Denial and Blame

When things go wrong, our emotions inevitably emerge – anger, guilt or anguish – and we look for an exit. Anger might take the exit of blame – “it’s somebody’s fault”. Guilt may take the exit of denial – “It’s not really my turn.” Anguish usually looks to escape.

Closing the exits means staying with the feelings, whatever they are. Feelings are like muscles – the more intensively you stay with the feelings, the more emotional heavy lifting you can do.

Being with the Way Things are by Clearing Judgements

We have the human gift of being able to judge, to distinguish between good and evil. But sometimes, we use ‘good’ and ‘bad’ to impose categories where there are none. For example, what is bad weather? After all, rain helps plants to grow. It’s just ‘bad’ because it makes things inconvenient for us.

Being with the Way Things are by Distinguishing Physical from Conceptual Reality

We tend to confuse physical reality and abstractions which are creations of the mind. Abstractions like ‘zero’ and ‘fairness’ are necessary tools to help us count and establish guidelines for behaviour respectively. But they are purely inventions of language. If we forget that they only refer indirectly to phenomena in the world, we might end up saying it is our ‘destiny’ when it rains on our holiday and make us think we are always destined to have a bad time.

There had been great preparation for the 1000-strong choir singing on Christmas Eve at the steps of Marina Square. They had practised and suffered especially one long night because one of their practices had been on that evening when the MRT had this big breakdown. But they had persevered despite their not really knowing each other, having come from various churches and some from overseas. And then it rained on Christmas Eve.

This could have been the reaction, “Oh no, after all our efforts – what a waste.” *Judgement* “We should have held it indoors, knowing December is the rainy season.” *Should* “How can you be the organiser of such a big event and not even think of an alternative place, instead of just leaving us there to sing with the rain coming down.” *Blame* “This always happens to things I take part in.” *Conceptual reality*

If you are practising “The Way Things Are”, you would have reacted, “Ok, it’s raining. What can we do next?” Enjoy the feel of being wet. Tease each other about how funny we look

with hair slicked down. Build up a special camaraderie with the carollers next to you. Keep singing and love the familiar music for what it says.

Today was a great morning for the first day of the school year and you all must have heaved a sigh of relief because the first day of school is inevitably chaotic (at least for the first hour) and rain would have messed it up right royally. But what if it rains at your next big event? As school leaders, how would you have reacted to *The Way Things Are*? (And I am not referring to the wet weather programme)

“Being with *the way things are* calls for an expansion of ourselves. We start from what *is*, not what *should be*; we encompass contradictions, painful feelings, fears and imaginings, and – without fleeing, blaming, or attempting correction – we learn to soar, like the far-seeing hawk, over the whole landscape. The practice of being with *the way things are* allows us to alight in a place of openness, where ‘the truth’ readies us for the next step, and the sky opens up.”