

## Experiencing loss

Loss is not easy. It's challenging to understand the purpose or meaning behind loss. We're witnessing a tremendous amount of chaos, destruction and disharmony on the planet - man-made and natural - every time we read the papers, listen to the radio, go online or watch TV. Many of us are affected by what we hear, read and see.

The question most often asked in response to difficult events and circumstances is, Why did this happen? Actually, this is not the most appropriate question to ask as very often we have no clue as to why bad things happen. More appropriately, two other questions can help us understand: (1) Why is this happening FOR me? and (2) What can I/we learn from what has happened? Underneath the questions is trusting that everything happens for a reason, a purpose.

There's a life principle that says when something negative happens, something is out of alignment and that something needs to change in order to be in harmony with the bigger picture, that is, there is something I/we need to learn in order to do our part in bringing about the needed change, the required balance and harmony.

Since we are all connected to everyone and everything (as everything was/is created from the same source) what occurs to others does in some way also affect us. What happens on the planet is universal in nature, speaking to all of humanity. For example, reflecting on the significance of hurricane Katrina, or other disasters can help us gain some deeper (than intellectual) perspectives that might help us learn from these experiences and serve us well for the future.

Death, injury and destruction of property, loss of any kind, in fact, teaches us about loss. We experience loss in order to see more clearly what we value, where our values come from and what is of greatest value.

Upon reflection, loss of family and friends through death or separation, points to our own mortality, and teaches us to live life more fully in the present and be grateful for the people and experiences in our life.

Loss through experience of injury reminds us that pain and limitation are opportunities to learn lessons, reflect and awaken potentials within ourselves. On a more conscious level, or deeper level, we understand the soul never suffers injury and our deeper self, our soul, provides support, strength, courage, and understanding qualities that support us when we know our body cannot do everything we want.

Loss through destruction of property and things we own reminds us that material things are temporary. (I often refer to folks who hope and pray that, when the end comes, their hearses will have luggage racks!). This type of loss teaches us to take care of what we have. Too, this type of loss can remind us to discriminate between what we need and what we desire. The Buddhists tell us that pain and suffering (mental, emotional, physical, and psychological) often occur when we have indiscriminately accumulated far more than what we need and have been obsessed or controlled by our possessions. (Do you know that the self-storage business in the U.S is a multi-billion dollar a year business!)

Loss makes people turn within leading us to connect to our fears, our values, our hopes and expectations. But more than anything, loss connects us with our fragility and vulnerability.

In the end, loss is an experience of being wounded. That is, we experience loss as feelings and emotions when honestly, sincerely and self-responsibly explored and inquired into often tell us we need to re-evaluate our relationships how we feel about and connect with life and other people, at work, at home and at play.

On a level of higher consciousness, one of the more significant meanings of natural disasters is to put us

in right relationship to nature. Disasters give us perspective - humility, often - in that they make us realize that we are not the center of the universe (damn!, many folks will say), that we are not in control and cannot control everything that happens, that we are part of a greater dynamic, complex life that is much bigger and more powerful than we are. Disasters are also a tug on our sleeve letting us know that nature is powerful and if we don't respect and align with it we can cause more destruction through not taking responsibility for abusing our environment.

When (if?) we realize this, we must ask ourselves how to live harmoniously within life. We must also ask ourselves what is important in life and what we ought to be spending our time, energy and money doing and supporting.

Experiences of loss can be quite humiliating, which essentially means putting us in our place so that we can relate appropriately. We humans tend to be rather arrogant in our efforts to control.

Loss is always a time of renewal. Renewal must first take place within our thoughts. We must re-think our lives and make decisions that will better serve our purpose than continue to cater to, and be driven by, our need for comfort and control. Loss provides an opportunity to begin creating a new future in which we may create new ways of looking at relating to our self, to others, and to the planet.

We can do this only if our thinking goes in the direction of awakening feelings of responsibility toward the environment, and feelings of equality, acceptance and respect toward our fellow humans at work, at home and at play.

Loss prompts us to restore right relationships. As long as we think we can control everything it will be proven to us that we cannot. As long as we disregard the fact that we are part of nature, we will suffer the disconnections. As long as we judge ourselves superior to others or be judgmental toward them, that inequality will be challenged and we will experience fear of others in some way, shape or form. Its this fear that will motivate us to do some things that are harmful to others and to ourselves.

Our disregard or ignorance of right relationships blocks the soul, blocks you and me, from expression but at the same time evokes its presence. Let experiences and feelings of loss teach us the needed lessons so that we can live life from a deeper place and have it infuse our minds, hearts and behaviors with empowering, confident, intelligent caring, concern, compassion, forgiveness and understanding.

**So, some questions for self-reflection are:**

- What losses have you experienced that you find difficult to accept?
- What can you learn (or have you learned) about yourself from these losses, about your values, about how you relate to others, to things?
- What deeper heart-felt qualities do you need to express as a result?
- Who or what are you attached to? Who would you become if you lost or let go of these attachments?
- Are you a collector of stuff?
- Do you ever reflect on your own mortality? If so, what is/was that like?
- Do you sometimes feel or act as though you are the center of the Universe? If so, why?
- Do you have a need to control? If so, why?
- What are your top ten values? Why? What do these values get you?

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