

No Mud, No Lotus

Over the years, I've become a devout believer in the notion of necessary suffering – that you cannot heal, grow or become “conscious”, deeply self-aware, without suffering.

Thich Nhat Hahn, Buddhist monk and author – puts it this way:

"It's like growing lotus flowers. You cannot grow lotus flowers on marble. You have to grow them on the mud. Without mud, you cannot have a lotus flower. Without suffering, you have no ways in order to learn how to be understanding and compassionate. That's why my definition of the kingdom of God is not a place where suffering is not, where there is no suffering..."

For me, it's not a question of whether you believe in God (Source, Spirit or whatever you call a higher power), nor is it about religion or theology." It' is about how one transforms to a higher state of self-awareness and consciousness so that one can walk the planet on a daily basis from a place of inner peace and equanimity.

The Buddha says:

*"As a blue or white lotus is born in the water,
grows up and is unpolluted by the water,
so too has the perfected one grown up in the world,
has risen above the world
and stands unpolluted by it. - samyutta nikaya 22 94*

The science of it all

The reason the Lotus flower is not polluted is due to its leaves. The leaves represent what is known as the “Lotus effect” - the leaves are so structured that water beads up and off the leaves, keeping the flower from being polluted. In fact, the leaves clean the lotus of real or potential pollution.

The science, according to Wikipedia, is: “...due to their high surface tension water droplets tend to minimize their surface trying to achieve a spherical shape. On contact with a surface, adhesion forces result in wetting of the surface: either complete or incomplete wetting may occur depending on the structure of the surface and the fluid tension of the droplet.” The cause of self-cleaning properties is the hydrophobic water-repellent double structure of the surface.

The nature of pollution

So, consider your life – at work, at home, ay play and in relationship. Are you confronted by “suffering” in some way, shape or form daily? Better, how are you confronted by suffering on a daily basis? Most of us are. How is it that we can manage to NOT be immersed by the polluted waters - literally and figuratively - of the context of our past and immediate environments?

The idea is each one of us grows up immersed in the “mud” – an environment characterized by wounding, abuse, criticism, judgments, abandonment, rejection and the like – an environment in which every family operates, into which every human being is born. It's the human experience. The degree of suffering may differ; but the muddy environment *is* there. The mud also represents painful childhood memories. Later on in life, the mud represents

our immediate, real-world "suffering" – mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually, and psychologically – that arises in the form of our life challenges- health, finances, social and living conditions, career, relationships, social life, finances...

When we get in touch with our own suffering, head-on - recognizing it, being open to it, chewing on it, digesting it, understanding the purpose of it, metabolizing it, rather than denying and avoiding it, we grow, we become more conscious, self-aware. When this happens, suffering is still there, but the "charge" it used to have becomes less and less as we understand the reasons for the suffering, how it leads to our growth, our self-understanding and our healing. It's the idea that You can have pain but you don't have to suffer."

The antidote to pollution

The growth of the Lotus, our individual Lotus, represents transformation – moving from suffering towards happiness, love, peace, stillness in our life - at work, at home, at play and in relationship.

When we do the "work" to transform, we gain clarity, insights, AHA moments all of which point to the "purpose" of our suffering, our wounding, and our challenges. In the process of understanding, something shifts. Your attitudes, your responses, your perspective. Where your focus is more on your Lotus, less on the mud.

Understanding our own suffering, we can also begin to understand others' as well – the place from which love and compassion grow. Many of us resist getting in touch with our suffering. But, when we do get in touch, we actually suffer less. We become the Lotus. That's the nature of the Lotus. That's the nature of the mud.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

Do you ever feel like a victim? If so, why? How does that show up in your life?
Has your suffering taught you anything/lessons? How so? What have you seen/learned?
What would it be like if you viewed your suffering as happening FOR you and not TO you?
Do you feel you are in control of your life? If not, why not?
Do you believe that change begins with you?
Do you tend to move away from your discomfort? If so, what might it be like to embrace it?
How do you feel when you consider this option?
To what degree (1-10), on a daily basis, do you identify with the mud, with the Lotus?
How did you experience suffering as a child? Do you still carry scars of that suffering with you now? How so?

P.S. If you're someone with a tendency to fix, save or otherwise rescue others from their suffering, the story of the butterfly and the cocoon is worth reading. You can find one of many versions here.