

## **From Pain to Grace;** *A life Time Dance*

In life, we can play one of three roles: a cynic, an observer, or a contributor. As cynics we tend to complain about circumstances and do nothing about them. Our actions do not go beyond verbal objections and protests. While in the role of an observer, we act exactly as the audience of a play or a football match: criticise, express opinions, share our points of view, cheer, condemn and go home afterwards.

In these two roles our actions produce no change in our reality. They are motions without impact; sterile behaviour. So, who is in charge of our lives? Reality is. Our life circumstances become the determining factor in our lives, not us. We only express our dissatisfaction by complaining and criticising, but reality as we perceive it dominates the scene. In other words, we play the role of victims - victims to our circumstances.

On the other hand, the role of a contributor dictates an action that produces an impact and allows for a change. As contributors we do something, or stop doing something, to produce a desirable change and own our reality. Therefore, we play the role of owners – owners of our circumstances.

One could argue that sometimes there is nothing we can do about our life circumstances, so how could we own them? My answer is by embracing them. If we find it in ourselves to accept whatever we have on hand right this moment, we can go on adapting our lives accordingly. But if we resist and refuse to accept, we will not have a starting point from which we can move on to create the reality we want.

If it is something we can not fix, then we ought to adapt to it. Only then can we progress and grow in life. This is no easy task by all means. It takes a lot from us to accept certain “undesirable” circumstances. Foremost, it

takes a lot of inner courage. Not the courage we see in action movies, but the courage to face ourselves and our own reality as it truly is; the courage to accept facts without the drama and emotions associated with it. A compelling example are people born with a physical challenge which they can do nothing about. Some of them manage to accept their challenges and adapt to them. They intentionally formulate a mind set for themselves through which they embrace their situations and go on making the best of life.

So, we are looking at two basic roles we can assume in life: Either as a *victim* or an *owner*. Playing the role of a victim is usually associated with undesirable feelings such as frustration, anxiety, anger, irritation, and self pity to mention a few. These feelings are legitimate and justifiable. When we are unhappy about a situation and nothing seems to change, we will naturally feel this way. In fact, we ought to be grateful to have these feelings! They are there to tell us that something is in need of our attention.

Our feelings are the best compass that nature has provided us with. But if we do not own our feelings and go on blaming other people or other circumstances for them, we'll never change anything. Did the others create these feelings or did we? Did the situation make us feel the way we do or is it the way we perceive and interpret it? The fact is that we generate these feeling for ourselves from within. We react to certain situations that do not look like what we want them to, and so we feel irritated. How we relate to the outer world is an internal exercise. And our feelings are the gauges that indicate to us whether or not the outer world is similar to our expectations.

If we do not acknowledge these feelings and use them as an indication to own a situation, then we get stuck in the miserable state of a victim. And this situation will keep feeding on itself. The more we go on not contributing or adapting to our surroundings the longer they'll stay the same and feed our frustrations. And the louder we complain, the less people are

willing to listen to us. Would we want to be associated with someone who complains all the time? How would we feel around a person who constantly judges others? And the same goes for others, unless of course, we have something in common. That is to say, people who complain all the time tend to hang out with each other. People who criticise and compulsively judge others find comfort in each others company. If we take a good look around us, we'll notice this phenomenon - "Birds of feather flock together".

We will constantly find ourselves tempted to choose the role of a victim. Why? Aren't we free to choose the mind set we want? After all, our ability to choose is the one thing that nobody can take away from us. In fact, the only freedom we truly possess as a human race is the freedom of choice. No matter how hard others try to coerce us to do something, we ultimately own the choice whether to do so or not. Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years, and yet he embraced his freedom to choose justice.

This is because along with the freedom of choice comes responsibility. Being an owner means to do whatever it takes to create the reality we desire. Therefore, we are ultimately responsible for whatever circumstances we create, and this is what many of us try to avoid and struggle to accept. It is much easier to hold someone or something else responsible for our reality. It is much safer to hide behind complaints and criticism and blame others for the way things are. Otherwise, it would have been us who are accountable and risk being the subject of criticism, or worse, failure!

To play the role of an owner means we must put some kind of an effort, whether physical or mental, to make a change. So why bother? Moreover, as an owner, we would risk making mistakes, or god forbids ask the help and assistance of others! Or worst of all, we'll have to constantly re-examine and evaluate ourselves! We've been brought up to do things right. At school, we got graded for the things we did correct. Doing mistakes was "bad" and diminished our chances for success. We see mistakes as a potential for failure. It is hard enough for us to be told by others that we're wrong, imagine how hard it would be telling ourselves that! No, thank you. I'd rather be a victim and always be right, than an owner and risk being wrong.

Should we view mistakes as presents, then underneath all that wrapping there is a precious gift, a lesson. Mistakes might not show us the right way to go, but they definitely tell us where not to go. They are a source of wisdom.

This is not to say that being an owner is *better* than a victim. We will always fall in the trap of a victim or be tempted to do so. The challenge here is to constantly be aware of where we are, accept it, and summon the inner courage to make the shift. Whether it is by adapting, acting or both, the freedom of choice resides exclusively in us. The choice to transform pain into grace is a life time dance, and we are the dancers.

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