

February 21, 2021

Suffering

Dear Friends,

-Over 500 years before Christ, the Greek playwright Aeschylus wrote: *“He who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep pain, which cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart, until in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.”*

-600 years before Christ, Buddha’s ‘first noble truth’ says, *“Life is suffering.”*

-The central mystery of faith for Christianity surrounds the life, suffering and death of Jesus.

In his book, *“When Bad Things Happen to Good People,”* Rabbi Harold Kushner wrestles with the question and reflects that God is with people in their suffering, but is not fully able to prevent it. Suffering, then, is a central part of human existence and a central question in every religion. We who are grieving understand these questions now more than ever.

They say hindsight is 20/20, and as I look back on my own life and my own suffering, I can honestly say that it has in fact brought me wisdom. So very many of the people I have known and walked with over these thirty years have also grown in wisdom through, or despite, their experiences of sadness and pain. All of this is fact, but I cannot address the question as to why the world or the universe is the way it is. That part remains a great mystery. Nevertheless, as young people like to say these days, “It is what it is.” And we have no choice but to live in this reality.

It seems, the way we choose to deal with suffering is of utmost importance to our life and our future. I find that remaining open, even in the midst of the pain, to the possibility that it will bring me somewhere, can be quite helpful in ‘getting through it.’

Getting through our suffering requires release. Like a pressure cooker, our grief can build up within us to the point of explosion. This can happen, and probably will, to all of us at some point, or at many times in our lives. “We grievors are all susceptible to griefbursts. Even long, long after the death, something as simple as a smell, a word, a gesture, or a memory can bring

our loss crashing back upon us. We gasp at the pain and may find ourselves sobbing. The experience brings us to our knees. Griefbursts may be draining, but they are also normal and natural... We can't prevent griefbursts, but we can learn to embrace them when they flare up." (Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.) *Grief One Day at a Time*)

We most likely already have come to understand that during the grieving process, if we allow ourselves to have some sort of release from the buildup of tension and frustration, it can bring us closer to healing. As each teardrop falls, the pressure can slowly begin to subside. I've mentioned in previous reflections that research has proven that emotional tears actually contain the stress hormones and toxins that build up in our bodies while we experience suffering. Crying also releases the 'feel good' endorphins we so desperately need. (By the way laughter does too!)

Why is there suffering? I do not know. Is there suffering? Absolutely. What can we do about it? Now, that's a question we can, and have been, and will continue to address. In the meantime, let's take it one day, and if need be, one hour at a time, while we allow ourselves to feel whatever emotions we are feeling and to not judge them or suppress them, but let them flow, while we find ways to release: - talking, crying, shouting, writing, laughing, sharing, whatever it takes. With each baby step, with each tear that falls, with each day of loneliness and isolation, with each heartbreaking memory, perhaps we can allow ourselves to be open to believe that it can bring us to a wisdom that we cannot imagine or comprehend right now, but one that lies just beyond our sight on the horizon. The data is in. The possibility is real. Let's walk toward it together.

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Peace and Serenity, Kevin