

RADICAL PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Many years ago in the late 70's I heard an interview on the radio. A very successful business man was being asked to share his biggest secret of success. He said the thing that makes the difference between a successful person and one who fails is the ability to take full responsibility. The example he gave was, "If an attempt to build a business fails because your employees were not dependable or committed then you acknowledge that you don't yet have the management skills required to build a cohesive and dedicated team. So you begin expanding your knowledge about management and team building as part of your next business venture." You look for the silver-lining every time you get knocked off your path. Pick yourself up and look for the lessons and opportunities.

This interview made quite an impression on me because I could see how empowering this concept of taking full responsibility was. It could be related to not just business but also, all your relationships including the relationship you have with your self; your emotional, physical, mental health. It relates to your relationship with the planet, the universe and your spiritual source.

In effect what this kind of radical personal responsibility does is erase all thoughts of blame. There are no more victims or villains. There are only lessons being learned and the resulting challenges to find creative solutions. It's a very creative and self empowering way to live. Like learning how to play an instrument this way of thinking does not usually come naturally. We have been raised in a culture permeated with blame and taught to think in terms of victims and villains. Taking radical personal responsibility is, for most people, an acquired skill. It means having a willingness to accept that although the bulk of our beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and emotional reactions have been passed down to us or pressed upon us we do have the free will to question the validity of these and to determine if they are serving us well or not. If they do not serve us we can change them. We are not powerless or without the free will to choose our thoughts. Even a suffering drug addict has this choice.

Let's talk about suffering for a minute. People ask me, "What about the suffering of children at the hands of abusers or in poverty, people with diseases or injuries? Do you just say 'where's my silver-lining?'" The answer is, 'yes.' The silver-lining may be that you become inspired to uplift someone or a situation through kindness or generosity. It may be an inspiration behind the development of a community effort to support or teach compassion and forgiveness or develop better research programs. You have any number of opportunities to explore your own heart, emotions and beliefs around suffering. If someone is suffering will it serve them better for you to join in their suffering and share their anger and depression or will it serve them better to find the inspiration to uplift them? To join someone in their suffering will not make one person happy.

Here is one more perspective on suffering that may be worth exploring. We all know that animals experience physical pain and a myriad of emotions including happiness, anger, fear and grief. But is this the same as what we call suffering? I would like to make the distinction between pain- physical and emotional – and suffering. It is clear that both animals and humans feel physical and emotional pain. However, only we humans have the capacity, as far as we know, to use our thinking minds to re-examine, extrapolate, explore, re-visit and create various scenarios around the cause of our pain. We have the capacity to create complex webs of thoughts and concepts about our pain which cause us to not only revisit the pain over and over but it also magnifies it and gives it a life of its own which can survive for days, years and decades. It becomes a part of us because we aren't willing to let it go. Animals on the other hand, feel it simply as it is. A dog will grieve over the loss of its owner but after some time the grieving is complete and they are back to normal. They don't suffer in their minds by revisiting the cause of their pain as we do. They simply feel the loss and in time that feeling goes away. It is natural to feel pain and grief but suffering is a choice. We can begin to develop the skill to more consciously choose our thoughts.

When I am interviewing a new client for coaching I can tell fairly quickly if they will be able to move slowly or quickly toward their desires by listening for the way they perceive the world. If they see themselves as victims of outside circumstances with very little control I know this will be a client who needs a lot of time to make changes. I've had many clients who, although they say they want to change their life, they will not because they blame something or someone for keeping them stuck. My most successful clients are the ones who, despite their current life conditions, which sometimes seem quite painful, are willing to seek solutions and learn how to implement them. They use the coaching relationship to explore their future visions and creative solutions. And sometimes they need, as we all do, someone to remind them that they are the creators of their life experience.

"Man is buffeted by circumstances so long as he believes himself to be the creature of outside conditions, but when he realizes that he is a creative power, and that he may command the hidden soil and seeds of his being, out of which circumstances grow, he then becomes the rightful master of himself."--- James Allen