Rolling in the Deep

The Importance of Healthy Relationships and of Remaining Open

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As we meander through this mysterious continuum called Life there is little doubt that our experience of Love is at the pinnacle of existence. I am not referring to the gooey-eyed, head-over-heels kind of love but, rather, the more sober variety that can be found in parenting and friendship.

Luckily, most of us have been brought up in happy environments. However, as we grow older we become increasingly exposed to the loss of love. It is inevitable. Close friends and family die leaving a cavity filled with sadness in their absence.

And it's not only death that leaves its mark. Failed relationships and friendships can also cut deep wounds in the heart and in the psyche. For some it can become too much and, to various degrees, they withdraw from others. In many cases this is a subconscious decision, an act of primal self-preservation that renders the individual comfortably numb. They cash-in their emotional chips and leave the table.

Over the past few years I have noticed a few such people from various areas of my life. Once I had recognised this trend I began to reflect on my own path and whether I have become less predisposed to having the fun, laughter and levity that are indicative of a fully functioning relationship. Questions poured forth. "Have I healthily integrated emotional loss and pain in my life?" I thought. "Or have I stunted my personal development by settling to live at a distance from others?" Then again "Is it simply a natural progression for everyone; that we have only so much emotional reserves and that there comes a point in time when we can no longer extend ourselves?" I expect it happens to everyone to a greater or lesser degree.

Ultimately, however, when one withdraws from others it comes at a price. I recall the wise words of the great Anthony De Mello. He asked us to be careful not to replace our childlike spirits with childish human ways. I have always been struck by the difference in "childlike" and "childish". In this instance "Childlike" is the ability to retain a free-spirited, open and creative attitude to life. On the other hand "Childish" would refer to closed and immature choices borne out of fear and insecurity. The voice of the sages also came to mind. "As you deny others, you also deny part of yourself."

In the case of failed relationships we are asked to reserve judgement. When we pigeon-hole others we pigeon-hole ourselves by default as we are the reference point.

In essence, relationships are some of the most vital conduits through which we come to know ourselves. In fact, it's a two way street. One can understand another only to the extent that one can understand oneself. In this way it makes sense to continuously cultivate and maintain meaningful relationships. They ensure that your existence is a colourful one. Your life will be richer for it.

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