

Maintaining A Positive Attitude

Václav Havel is a Czech writer and dramatist. He was the tenth and last President of Czechoslovakia (1989_1992) and the first President of the Czech Republic (1993_2003). He is a man who, in the darkest of days, discovered the power of hope. Hope, he said, is a state of mind, not of the world. Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously heading for success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good."

If we lose hope, somehow we lose the force that keeps us moving ahead, and we find out courage diminished.

I think we all have something to learn from paradoxes that many of us are familiar with: the regeneration of bushland and grassland after a bush-fire; the plethora of wildlife after a drought has broken, and the flowers in the desert after a storm. It just seems part of the big picture that many seeds can only germinate after enduring a crisis. We all can think of many other examples. Many species of frogs and fish lie dormant in the drought affected caked river bed until the river flows once more.

A powerful image for me over many years has been the burning bush in the Moses story in the Jewish Scriptures. Moses came across a bush in the desert which was burning, but which was not consumed. He interpreted the experience as himself being on holy ground.

Part of the trouble with "burning bushes" is that they are difficult to see, and they are most often in the desert. I think this is what Ira Progoff¹ was talking about - we need to look to the area of our life where confusion and disorganization is at its fullest (our "wilderness" or "desert")

According to his own testimony, Victor Frankl, who survived three years at Auschwitz and other Nazi prisons, survived largely because he learned that "one can activate value on a spiritual level only in confrontations with unavoidable suffering, where there is no way out but through the darkest centre of a painful experience. One has no choice whether to face this suffering or not, but just because of that fierce limitation, one great possibility does remain - of choosing how one will react to the unavoidable suffering."²

We know that rural life which can be damaging in the extreme - heat and desert, wet and flood, rocks and sand, fire and drought. These and other symbols are particularly important to us as we interpret our acquired brain injuries. It might be important for me to learn how to draw on the energetic gift that these symbols can share with us if I stay with them and work with them.

Throughout my journey I've come across many people who feel somewhat damaged by life. If they were given a way to talk about it, they might say they were burned by a bush: it all looked OK, but somehow it turned ugly. They didn't know it was holy ground, and didn't take their shoes off. For most of them, the singe-ing has been transforming. The tragedy is that the

¹A Jungian psychiatrist who developed the "Intensive Journal Workshop" as a means of psychological healing and growth.

²*Man's Search for Meaning* Pocket Book, 1963

experiences have been, to keep the metaphor of fire, a scarring experience, and the transformations have been towards the ugly rather than the beautiful.

I look around and realise that most balance and well-being is costly one way or another, and that to be transformed is one of the most costly of all.

There was a phrase in a movie from quite some years ago, “Dead Poet’s Society” which said “carpe diem” - seize the day! Grab hold of the opportunity! The question is “How do I do that?”

In many ways, it is simply a decision

It is interesting that we get the word ‘crisis’ from a Greek word (krisis) which means either a separating, or a decision! It is the word from which we get the English word ‘cross’, and it also picks up the idea of decision - think of a cross-roads, or a fork in the road. It reminds me of

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the 'one less travelled' by,
And that has made all the difference.

(From Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken")

In the times when we’re tempted to be down on yourself or others or circumstances around, it is time to make a decision.

A technique I often teach people is to stand tall, tucking the tummy in, look upwards towards your forehead, and smile. When we slump over, it is easy to feel as if we are in a slump. When we change our posture, our thoughts and feelings can begin to change as well!

It's time for you to feel good about yourself. To accept who you are, where you are and what you are. I don't care how much money you have, colour, location or occupation. You need to feel good in your own skin. We all say "I'll be happy when..." The time is now.

Our happiness (or lack of it) is not really determined by what is going on around us. Circumstances happen all the time. Epictetus³ says that ‘it is not the things themselves that trouble us, but the thoughts we have about those things’

So we can choose to be cheerful and happy, in whatever situation we might find ourselves. It has been suggested by many that a strong positive mental attitude will create more miracles than any wonder drug, because we human beings, by changing our inner attitudes can change the outer aspects of our lives. Remember that each year, Spring comes in after winter!

Have you heard of Helen Keller? She was a remarkable woman, with every apparent reason to have a negative attitude, and feel that everything is against her. She was an American author, activist and lecturer, and the first deaf/blind person to graduate from college.

³Epictetus was born about 55 a.d. and was a Greek Stoic philosopher. He was probably born a slave and lived in Rome until his exile to Nicopolis in north-western Greece.

Her teacher, Annie Sullivan, broke through the isolation imposed by a near complete lack of language, allowing the girl to blossom as she learned to communicate, has become known worldwide through the dramatic depictions of the play *The Miracle Worker*.

What is less well known is how Keller's life developed after she completed her education. A prolific author, she was well travelled, and was outspoken in her opposition to war. She campaigned for women's suffrage, workers' rights and socialism, as well as many other progressive causes.

Keller said 'No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new doorway for the human spirit. Be of good cheer. Do not think of today's failures, but of the success that may come tomorrow. You have set yourselves a difficult task, but you will succeed if you persevere; and you will find a joy in overcoming obstacles.

I guess it depends on the way you look at things, doesn't it. Instead of complaining that roses have thorns, be happy that thorns have roses.