

Nothing in This World Lasts Forever

Gloria and I have just returned from running a retreat in North Wales with our dear friend Jacky Seery. The seventeen of us on retreat had a fabulous time for 5 days (Thank you so much everyone!!) But now, another beautiful dream is well and truly over. So this month, I thought I would write about how to handle that seemingly tragic fact of life.

On some level or other, we are all perfectly aware that nothing lasts in this world. However, in our day to day lives, we tend to assume that everything we know and love is going to always be there for us. For example, a while back, we went on retreat every summer with Jason Chan to a small village in Phuket. Year after year, we would go back to the same hotel, the same beach, and the same restaurants. Then on Boxing Day 2004, a devastating tsunami hit the coast in Phuket. When we returned the following summer, the village we had known and loved was a broken shell. I clearly remember wandering down the main street crying my eyes out – not only for all the people who had died that terrible day, but for myself and my attachment to something that had now been destroyed.

I think one of the most heartbreaking aspects of impermanence in this world is not that nothing lasts, but that human love or warm friendships can so quickly turn to coolness or even hate. Again, I clearly remember an event that took place in my own life over 60 years ago (!!). Three of my very best friends at Primary School suddenly decided that they were not going to let me join them in their den - made of a few stones laid out in a small circle in the playground. I was heartbroken, even though the very next day, they let me play with them again. Of course, when I was older, I experienced the dramatic ending of romantic love several times, and each time, I think my heart closed up against future heartbreak just a little more.

So the question I want to explore with you this month is: What on earth can we do when we lose a loved one or a cherished friend – either through death, or because they disappear from our life for some other reason?’

Well first of all, we have to acknowledge our deep sense of loss and hurt. We cannot just adopt a stiff upper lip every time someone dear to us disappears from our world, unless we are happy to spend the rest of our life tensed up against our true feelings and against future hurts. But there are definitely unhelpful v. helpful ways to express the feelings of grief, anger, loneliness etc. that inevitably follow the end of any special relationship.

First, it is really helpful to accept the reality of any kind of breakup or loss in our lives rather than to insist, ‘This cannot be happening to me!’ We can argue with what is happening in our lives for a very long time. But as Byron Katie has so wisely pointed out, doing this is like ‘trying to teach a cat to bark.’ So first, when we are upset by anything that has happened to us in this crazy world, we accept what has happened, and then, we hold our painful-self in unconditional love and compassion.

Whenever we are hurt by life, we need to really love ourselves unconditionally, as we allow ourselves to fully experience all the feelings of failure or heartbreak that a particular loss or betrayal has stirred up in us. Whenever we are hurt or grieving, we need to be as loving and kind to ourselves as the most loving mother skillfully comforting her hurt child. Most people I know are wonderful human beings. They usually make every effort to be kind and loving towards others. But very often, they forget to be as loving and kind to themselves, particularly when they are going through a major challenge in life. However, being kind to ourselves in difficult circumstances can actually make all the difference to our long-term health and well-being.

Next, it is essential for our long term well-being to let go of any feelings of anger or resentment towards someone who has left us in the lurch. It is perfectly normal to feel angry if a partner, family member, or close friend betrays us or abandons us. However, if we hang onto our anger for any length of time, the energy of this dark emotion may actually poison us. Tragically, some individuals hang onto grievances against a family member, a past partner or an estranged best friend for the whole of their lives. They may believe that hanging onto their anger like this is somehow punishing the person who injured them, but of course, the person they are really punishing with their negative thoughts and feelings is themselves!

Last but not least, to find real comfort and security in the midst of a chaotic, ever changing world in which even those closest to us can disappear from our lives in a heartbeat, we need to search deeply and diligently for what lies beyond this very temporary physical existence of ours.

What I have found during my own awakening journey is that there is definitely an out-of-this-world love that is everlasting and unchanging. Only our connection to it comes and goes. This love - that some may call divine love - is totally unconditional and eternal. It never distinguishes between the deserving and undeserving, or the beautiful and the ugly. It extends its infinite blessings to all living creatures, just as the sun shines on all of us alike.

Tuning into this all-embracing love is totally different from experiencing romantic love, or a strong desire for one special person. When we are connected to this out-of-this-world love, all our fears and loneliness totally disappear for a while. We feel so secure and so joyful that our only purpose becomes to share this love with everyone we meet. I have been blessed to experience this universal, unconditional type of love on many occasions over the last twenty years or so – usually when I am towards the end of a fairly intense spiritual retreat such as the one we just ran in North Wales.

If you have already directly experienced unchanging, universal love, ‘Congratulations!’ If not, please do not think it is unavailable to you. Even telling yourself that deep within your own heart is a miraculous type of love that can extend outwards to transform every aspect of your life is a great start on your journey home to everlasting love, peace and joy.

Moreover, whenever you do lose someone you love - either through death, or a parting of another kind - you can know that whilst their physical form may have disappeared, the love that you shared was real and everlasting.

So please know this: Love never dies. Human beings in their physical forms definitely come and go in our lives as if by magic, but the true love we share with one another is eternal and unchanging!

Peggy Foster
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