

Conditions:

Imagine someone were to tell you that they were seriously stressed-out by their job and were finding that they could no longer cope with its demands and expectations. Suppose they wanted you to help them to know what to do.

In order to understand their distress you would want to know who they were accountable to, if they had a job description, if their role was clear, if too much was expected of them, if they got encouragement, etc. In short, you would need to know the conditions in which they work in order to understand why they were feeling so stressed out. In understanding the conditions you might be able to help the person realise that *anyone* in their situation would feel the same because the conditions within which they worked made it impossible for them.

To understand why we struggle in any situation we must understand the conditions within which we work before we can find the right solution. This is obvious.

Let me invite you to take the same approach to life itself. To understand why you feel the way you do about your life, you must fearlessly look at the conditions of life itself. This is a quite fascinating and enthralling exercise. It is one I have done with many groups of people with often quite dramatic realizations.

Let me put it this way: Imagine that God, before your birth, presented you with a contract to sign that laid out the essential and core conditions of life. From your knowledge of life, as revealed through history and across cultures, try to imagine what the core conditions of the contract would say. You will probably find that the essential conditions are the very one's you seek most to deny in your own life.

As you might imagine, the defining condition in your life-contract would state very simply that you are mortal - that as soon as you begin life you are, in effect, *mortally wounded*. Anything else we have to say about our life is shadowed entirely by this fact. The wound of your life is your own dying.

This is not what you would want to read at the beginning of your contract, but it defines your essential humanity. Despite all your noble aspirations and creations, you pass away and die. It seems almost like an insult to everything we aspire to in life. The fact of your own death, and the death of those you love, is almost unbearable. It is a truth that, from time to time, slams into your heart with a dreadful foreboding.

We know that most of our psychological efforts are invested in trying to eliminate this truth from our experience. We reflexively seek to counter it with experiences of your everyday significance by trying to exaggerate our sense of power, status, stature, significance, victory, and immortality.

Violence and the pursuit of power are everyday ways we deny this humbling life condition. Anthropology shows how violence and the killing of others creates the illusory feeling of having victory over death. The murderer feels, at least for a short time, that he is actually a God.

In truth, we all know this feeling. We all know the perverse yet addictive pleasure that comes from experiencing some form of victory over someone or something. It can be challenged in healthy ways into sport, or explode in murderous violence as in the Middle East. To be victorious over another counters that knowing awareness that, in truth, we are powerless over fate.

This life-condition, your wounded mortality, says, in effect, it is not you that is all-powerful, it is not you that controls your fate, in fact your life is not about you. Your life is about the life that is living you.

So how must we bear this condition? In everyday domestic life, does this have any relevance? It does.

The fact of our mortal woundedness creates an acute sensitivity to the fragility of life, to the transient beauty that surrounds us. “The beauty of the world hath made me sad, this beauty that will pass,” wrote Pease. And, unbeknownst to us, it is this condition that awakens our desire and love. Sometimes couples say that making up after a fight evokes the deepest desires. Why? Because a threatened break-up evokes our hidden fear of death. Our deepest self knows that we are mortally wounded and because of this we can reach out with compassion and desire.

To accept your wounded vulnerability is to find humility and gentleness. To accept the fragility of life is to know sorrow and beauty, to feel compassion and affection, and to appreciate the blessings in your life. The fact of your dying and the inevitability of loss creates your sensitivity to beauty and the passing rapture of joy.

Because of this fact, suffering and grief are written into the contract of life. In every little corner of life there is, because of our vulnerable mortality, suffering. And because of this, there is love.