

Essentials:

An exercise I have done with personal development groups is to ask people to identify experiences in their life that caused them to live their lives in a more soulful and deeply felt way, that have called them to live more passionately with the essentials of life. What people report back is simply this:

Those experiences that cause us to engage with the essentials of life and live more fully are typically experiences you would not wish on anyone.

Those experiences are about death. They include the death of loved one's; the trauma of broken relationships; the survival through serious illness; the loss of a job; etc. On occasion it included happier events like the birth of a child but over 90% of responses involve experiences of death, loss, and trauma which trigger some form of personal transformation.

This is deeply revealing of what it takes to awaken us to that which is essential, to cause us to live a more intimate and emotionally honest life, to cause us to savour life's preciousness. When people have remote or proximate encounters with death, it quickens the soul and opens the heart to passion, fragility and love.

Sorrow

All of life is filled with sorrow. Grief is not bound by time. You carry the loss of the generations that have passed, just as you carry the loss of generations to come. When you are moved to tears you weep for an accumulation of losses about which you know little. When you experience grief it is typically not just the emotion of an event that is felt, but also a life-time accumulation of losses. The sorrow that is evoked in you is often not just your own sorrow but the sorrow of the ages.

Though every mother weeps for a lost child and every father stands alone in the mountains, they are not alone. She weeps the tears of her mother and her mother's mother. His father and grandfathers all wander the mountainside of grief. Grief is accumulated and anticipated across time. It is handed down. When you look at your child in the distance with love, you see what your mother saw when she looked at you. When you weep in the evening, it is your father's tears that fall uncomforted to the floor.

All things come to pass. We all are faced with the sorrow of life. You, I have no doubt, wander across the same landscape of the soul. You are encircled by a mysterious, wonderful, and grief-stricken world that inspires and wounds you. Life is a great wound that bleeds with compassion. You breathe and bleed as you walk. You are being born and dying.

You are dealing with the fragility of life, the transient impermanence of beauty, the passing river that is love, the gentle mist of a loved one who has parted, the grey settling fog of a dream now unfulfilled; the ecstatic joy once held that now dissolves in the everyday breeze of living. You are dealing with the hunger in your heart for a home, a love, a kiss, an expression, and an embrace that funnels all the miracles of the stars in heaven down into the heartbeat of your soul. Your heart has a deeply felt

longing that is simultaneously fulfilled and unfulfilled. To the degree that it is unfulfilled it calls you forward into the sorrow of the future, and to the degree that it is fulfilled it calls you forward into the joy of that same destiny. You are a pilgrim.

You will be familiar with this in the quiet of your mind. In the still of the evening you will know the language of the Heavens, you will hear the verse of sorrow and the melody of love. When the stars in the heavens have gone to sleep you alone lie awake under the burden of living, fretful in the stresses and worries of life, and hear the haunting melodies of grief in the background of your uninhibited joys. Having spoken with thousands of people I know this to be true of you as well as of me. That which quickens your soul and calls you into being is about beauty, sorrow, courage, and death.

Love and Death

“The Grief now is part of the happiness then. That is the deal.” Debra Winger’s character says to her lover in the beautiful film “Shadowlands”, when speaking of the grief they both endure as she dies of cancer. Love and death are so inextricable entwined. Yet most couples do not feel or see how death is the companion of loves passion. To know love is to know death. To know bliss is to know deep sorrow. It is such a painful and exquisite chalice from which to drink.

It is our proximity to Death that awakens our sensitivity to Life. It is when we feel the wind of Grief that we are awakened to the Love in our lives, it is when death breaks through the barriers of our private security that we are called to Courage and Bravery. These are times when you stand alone and the magical gift of your life is revealed. In these moments the awareness of how brief is your life startles you .

As you lie in your bed in the evening you see the trace of your lovers body in the dark, hearing the gentle breathing, and the innocence of his love. For a moment you reach over in the dark and touch his hair, thanking him, thanking your god for the moment, and regretting all the harsh words. For those moments he is your father, your small child, your God incarnate. Love flows through you as you drift into sleep.