

Marie W

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"Way's End," Beech Avenue, Camberley,  
Surrey, England

My dear Friends,

One of my correspondents writes to me in deep grief. He is an elderly man who has lost his wife. He feels that she was neglected by the doctors, the hospital and himself, and that if she had been taken greater care of she would still be here. He is full of remorse and regret and asks me if he is still with her on the other side when asleep. I think he feels he is a failure in most things in life. Alas! that is so common. Most of us are some sort of failure measured by the standards we have of success. There is only one way to make a "success" of life, and that is to have been born with, or to have acquired, a really strong character. I am not a strong character myself, and I can see so clearly, at the end of a long life, that no one was so much my enemy as myself. To be an unvarying success, one must have the insight to see, and the strength of character to grasp, an opportunity when it comes. There is a great truth in those lines of Shakespeare that "there is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune." The majority of us do not see when the tide is full, nor do we have the strength to grasp it if we do discern it. So we wander in shallows, as Shakespeare puts it, for all life afterwards.

Does this not sound cruel? But it is not in reality. A strong, far-seeing character is the result of much suffering and mistakes in past lives. It also makes a man an essential "leader" because the majority of men lack that essential character. Do not let us mourn over this, and spend the rest of our lives commiserating ourselves, or even castigating ourselves. There is a profound truth in the statement of H.P. Blavatsky that the root of remorse is egotism. Think it out. Why does failure hurt so much? Because we are not in that comfortable, happy position of honour that might have been ours. Was it not Lord Byron who wrote that of all sad words the saddest were "it might have been." Now do let us face the fact that we are so hurt because we are missing comfort or honour that might have, or as we sometimes think, should have been ours. "Why was I such a fool?" people sometimes ask me. Because we were not grown up enough in the true sense of the term, and Life -- which is "God" -- knows best when it gives us the inevitable result to make us bigger. How would we acquire strength or evolve the faculty of insight and determination if we never suffered? Dr. Besant wrote a pamphlet called "The Meaning of Pain," and she said to me one day, "When I look back over a long life, I would willingly surrender all my joys, but none of my sorrows, because I learnt the most by them." Joy and pain are one of the "Pairs of opposites" through the play of which we evolve self-consciousness and self-motivation, but the spiritual Life is beyond both of them. So much the One is it that its nature is called bliss. So a Master writes that their pupils are taught to be as indifferent to psychological pain as physical. And the Master wrote to Mr. Judge: "Regret nothing, never be sorry, but cut all doubts with the sword of knowledge."

We are all familiar with the words of St. Paul, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." And he goes on to say, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons. But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.... Now no chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

The law of "action and re-action, equal and opposite," reigns in the psychological world as in the physical. If we make others happy we shall be happy, if we make others miserable we shall be miserable ourselves. "Be not deceived," writes St. Paul, "God (the Life Force) is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." As I said, this sounds cruel, but it is remedial. It is

the heavenly surgeon's remedial operation. Only just think. Whom do we seek when suffering overtakes us? Someone who has never suffered and probably tells us just to "cheer up"? The fruit of pain, suffering and loss is understanding, sympathy and compassion. It is a heavy price to pay but it is worth it. So St. Paul tells us to "lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees," and to make straight paths for ourselves lest that which be lame be turned out of the way, "But let it rather be healed." And he even says of the Lord Christ that "though he were a son yet learnt he obedience by the things which he suffered;" that is the understanding of the unbreakable laws of Nature, physical and psychical. This reminds me of a passage in Jeremiah: "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee; and thy backslidings shall reprove thee."

And the pain of knowing that we should have been kinder and more understanding to one who has gone from us. Why did we lack it? Because we were tired or irritated or "fed up." How we long for them to come back so that we can tell them that we did not really mean it. As I said to my friend, in the world of the soul we have never lost touch. Let us tell them that when we leave our bodies at night and are again with them. In that higher world they will know and understand. It would be a happy thing, and the greatest consolation, as the Master once said to a woman disciple, if we could know that we had never done any hurt to any living thing. But that is so rare. We have, most of us, consciously or unconsciously, done hurt to many. Thus we owe them a debt, and Life will see that we have occasion to pay it. But then it is by the payment of those Karmic debts that we grow in wisdom and strength. So let us bravely take the hand of Life and the re-actions of our own foolishness and even selfishness. The ones we love will come back to us to receive that measure of love and care we would have given them, and meanwhile morning and night think of them with tender love and send them your whole heart. They will get it surely. The opportunities we lost -- do not grieve. Another will come again in the long future. Let us remember the splendid words of Robert Browning, the most Theosophical of all the great poets: "There shall never be one lost good; what was shall be as before." I wonder if we could manage to learn of Life and thus to forgive ourselves as we forgive others? For when we can truly forgive ourselves, we have really learnt the lesson Life is teaching us.

The Catholic monks and nuns feel that they can vicariously take on some of the world's pain as the Christ and all the world Teachers are said to have done. So little Therese of Lisieux said that her chief joy lay in suffering. She suffered a great deal and she offered that pain to God for the ransom of souls (though I privately think that is a terrible idea!) We are all sinners, that is, we have all done things that lacked patience and understanding and love. So let us all hold each other by the hand when Life, the great Teacher, brings us the resulting pain by which we may grow in wisdom and love. Love and courage are all that matter in this world. So let me close with some more splendid words of Browning, I think it is from his poem "The Patriot." So he wrote of:

"One who never turned his back but marched straight forward,  
 Never doubted clouds would break,  
 Never deemed though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,  
 Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake."

And Tenhyson also wrote that we "rise on stepping stones of our dead selves to higher things."

Your affectionate friend,

Clara Codd