

To Let Go of Trauma or Not to Let Go?

On a recent end of the evening walk I take daily, my roommate who walks along with me was giving me solace for certain pain that I've experienced in my marriages that ended in divorce. It comes up every time I speak of my reaction to the traumatic affect on the children from each divorce. She was consoling me and suggesting that I would benefit emotionally should I be willing to "Let it go." In saying this I initially felt put off by this suggestion, taking it as a kind of a judgment and put down. I reacted stating, "What do you mean by 'letting it go?'" She rightly being surprised replied, "It seems to bother you as the subject is brought up frequently on our walks. It does bother you doesn't it?" Feeling somewhat cornered I repeated my question as to what she meant. Being such a dear person she attempted a few more times to suggest that getting past a hurt feeling that initiated from the past was a good thing to do. She was working against my tide of feelings that were not fully conscious. We fell quiet for a while and I searched inside as to why I was so uptight with her suggestion. Internally, to counter balance my reactive state, I brought up to myself my good feelings toward her. As a consequence, after walking another block I was able to assert to myself that I knew that what she meant by hoping that I could get beyond the pain of the family dissolution was that she cared for me and she didn't like to see me continue to suffer a trauma that couldn't be undone. Still, I wanted to know why what she said in such a caring manner was so upsetting to me and how I was unsettled with what it would mean to me if I could follow her suggestion.

I know when I was younger this is what I also said to people whom I was consoling. It wasn't very comforting to them either. I remembered saying these "catch all phrases with acquaintances and friends who continued to lament the past over and over again. It hurt me to witness their continued suffering. So I like everyone else would say, "You got to get over it. Just let it go. It doesn't do anything good for you to carry this emotional burden. It stops you from living a more joyful life and you are passing up new opportunities." Actually it didn't really hurt me. To be more clear with myself I'd have to say that eventually it really bothered me when they couldn't or wouldn't follow my suggestions. Why, I don't know, but I have to admit it would be helpful to me if I did have some insight.

Yes, there was something in hearing these phrases directed at me that didn't sit well. Is it just an attachment to the past that I can't let go and get over? I felt that it meant something more than that and this as yet undefined something more was the subconscious reason for me not getting over it and letting it go. I could feel her concern and yet it wasn't comforting. Why?

I kept asking her what she meant and everything she said was like what everyone else means when they say these sentences. I guess my repetitive questioning of her was a form of aggression, like some kind of punishment. What was disconcerting me? I didn't feel like I wanted to ignore the mystery and so when we returned back to our apartment she and I explored it further.

In speaking about it consciously for the first time, it was elevating and informative. Informative in that when I explore a subject or a feeling it opens a connection to my intuition. So in connecting to my intuition it speaks through me in new thoughts and I listen to what I'm saying with great attention for it is as new to me as to the person with whom I am exploring. I related in this way that for me Trauma isn't

something to necessarily get over. It seemed that one aspect of my reticence to “moving on” was that I sensed that letting it go is just one of our less humane American cultural influences. *Something is broken. Let it go. Get a new one.* That cultural dogma has pissed me off for years. To me it’s about, “If it’s broken, fix it. If it can’t be fixed maybe it still has some sentimental value and so I might just keep it for that reason.” What’s wrong with that? I’m sure I’m not the only guy who wears a favorite shirt or pair of pants long after others feel that it needs to be tossed. But what about it if it’s about keeping something emotional and not just about a physical article of clothing or what ever?

If it is something that is emotionally broken it often can’t be just fixed. Yet, doesn’t our American ethic to be better consumers require us to just toss it away? But then I had to wonder about the tossing away of broken objects and how it might inadvertently influence our relationships? “Hmmm, this relationship seems broken. Is it then some thing to get rid of?” Or, if there is an emotional trauma is that something to also be tossed out? Isn’t that what we are doing when we try to fix it. Fixing an emotional event, a trauma...what does that mean exactly I wondered. Perhaps less nightmares, flashbacks, uncontrolled emotional swings. I’m not sure that’s the total outcome. I mean yes, the symptoms might decline but I’m not sure that the emotional injury just doesn’t transfer to another area of life. Perhaps, the affect of the trauma just changes its presentation to be less recognizable. Getting rid of something that hurt us...is that not a cultural response that masks the very cause of why I experienced the trauma? Is this a good way of dealing with trauma?

I guess this is one thing that bugs me about therapy. Therapy to me can be about understanding, however given the Behaviorist Revolution much of therapy is now about moderating behavior regardless of how it may still feel so that one fits into the social situations of life. I see the value of this and yet does it ever deal with the cause of the feeling? Like how does one cope with being brought up on Spiritual teaching of love and sharing and forgiveness and yet go off to war and kill not just combatants but civilians? If someone has participated in these killings then shouldn’t one have nightmares, flashbacks, and uncontrolled emotional swings. I mean the mind does this to signal a crisis and then while it maybe about PSDT and the new wave of therapies that inhibit the symptoms, but does this allow the person to apologize, to make restitution, to seek forgiveness of being caught up in grips of military psychology? “I was young. I didn’t know. I wasn’t myself once I was subjected to the indoctrination. I’m so sorry.”

At this point I was in the flow of my intuition and here’s an interesting perspective that it laid on me. Certainly when I get sick it is uncomfortable and even very painful. I suffer this discomfort and hope to get well soon. When I recover I move on in life, but is the experience really over? I have been taught that it is, just like being told when young that when I fall, yes it hurts, but then it’s important to get back up and keep on moving. Yet, in illness, say like the measles or the chicken pox, I do get well however do I not I keep some relationship with these illnesses with the new antibodies that my body has created to make me immune to the disease in the future. If I got rid of the disease without maintaining these antibodies that my body developed to overcome the illness wouldn’t I be susceptible to a reoccurrence.

This example demonstrates the value of not completely letting go. In the physical disease my body learns from the experience. It does expel the virus however it learns valuable things from that virus and that increases my body’s ability to be stronger than

before. My immune system becomes more flexible and effective. So in this light getting well and being stronger isn't really about getting over it and letting it go. It seems to be about keeping some level of manageable and even helpful relationship with it.

At this point in the effort to explore my feelings I began to see the value of perceiving my emotional injuries in this light. Sure I can seek to reduce the symptoms that negatively affect my welfare, but I began to see how important it is to understand my vulnerabilities that would lead me to be so affected by these occurrences. Was I doing the right thing for the wrong reasons? It was coming clear that I was resisting getting over the difficult outcome of the divorces because deep inside I felt that to do so would be to leave an unresolved issue that could eventually fester into something like an infection that would cause my mind to become even more confused and distressed.

I gave voice to my acknowledgment that choosing not to get over it at times was very difficult. My roommate then was confused why not letting go of it wouldn't be better. Intuition expressed through me that by not getting over it allowed me to take the incidents very seriously in the light of why the divorces took place and to discover the lessons to be learned from that inquiry. I related that these lessons went beyond either my individual involvement or that of my ex-wives for these lessons also included the influence of our parents, siblings, children and even further, the cultural influences that had a part in the dissolution of these marriages.

We began to look at the trauma more intensively. I knew that the injury wasn't strictly an individual experience as it also seriously affected those whom I love. Sure divorce is encouraged when things don't work out. Toss it. Get over it. However, what about if there are children? Don't they then also get tossed if not out, then definitely tossed about. I have recognized since the divorces that the ripple affect of these decisions have continued into the present and has been demonstrating its presence in the manner in which the children were relating to me. The divorces were difficult enough to cope with but much more upsetting to me was the turmoil and betrayal of our love that divorce forced without their consent on the children.

So, it wasn't really about letting go and getting over it. Rather it was about my perseverance in not allowing myself to be deluded into a frame of mind that grasped onto this "quick-fix" American cultural ethic to escape the full responsibility of understanding how these catastrophes blindsided me and those who were also involved. It really isn't about getting on with life. Rather for me it has been about continuing on with life and forming a more complete relationship with the trauma so that I can learn how to live with it so that the trauma can lend its unique and powerful nature to my developing spiritual consciousness.

With this insight and subsequent acknowledgement, I voiced that my repeated "need" to share these traumatic incidents was apparently a seeking to connect together in a deep and intimate manner. I have been doing this intuitively before this conversation we were having as we explored this phenomena. I suggested that as an outcome to this sharing she could join me in setting up a new and more healthy framework to not get over it, to get on with life, because we were demonstrating to each other that we can feel safe to incorporate our struggles in our relationships in a good way.

In writing this account at this point I seem to need to step out of the conversation and look at the following, which does relate in its own way.

To me, due to our manner of living life in America there is so little practical help in educating ourselves, and each other across all the generations: New born, infant, toddler, child, teenager, young adult, adult, and the elderly. In the United States there is such a focus on youth and consumerism that it looks to me to be a strategy to marginalize the elderly who have learned much about life. Our consumer Youth Culture has placed a gap between generations and as a result young people have been prevented and now are not open to accessing this wisdom. For this younger generation, the seller sets the price, and the young consumer makes the purchase at that price without the ability to negotiate. Where's the relationship and the ability for the consumer and seller to set a fair market price in this? What happened to our parent's and grandparent's skill in negotiating? The young aren't open to being taught by their elders; rather their teacher is now the consumer mentality. When their elders try to share their mature consumer skills they hear from the young, "That's old school. It's not the way it's done now." What happened to it? Why is it not the way things are done here? How then can wisdom be shared with our children if they are closed off to it because this isn't the way things are done here? They have been brainwashed to do it on their own. Doesn't this lead to their becoming victims of the sellers of goods and services because, "This is the way it's done." And for those who can't pay the price, like for health care, then it's "That's the way it goes." Where's the sense of community in this? Gone with all else who have been taught, "You got to let go and get on with it at the level of ability that you have." How isolating. How completely then are the elders of our society not only marginalized, but "Gotten over with?"

What can I learn about what led up to my divorces by not letting it go and getting on with life? Because I didn't come to properly understand what led up to my first divorce, this ability to be under the influence of denial, this then allowed me to confidently get remarried. Looking back it would have been helpful to have some mature person in my life that I was willing to trust who had the ability and skill to lead me to understand key elements in a successful marriage. Well, at the time I didn't have that kind of trust and so, obviously, no, I didn't learn the lessons I needed to learn. It wasn't that I thought that I hadn't, it was in fact because that I felt I had that I was willing to get married again. The real indicators of having made progress turned out to be still a mystery to me. So the trauma of the emotional disruption of the first divorce was amplified with the second divorce.

Now, I have learned that I can't be sure of my judgment even when I feel in my heart that I have learned enough to make a successful third marriage. I didn't hide from my lesson, nor was I bitter about it. I just couldn't get it and so every once in a while I would allow myself to feel the pain of myself and my family and amplify it by concentrating on the tenuous relationships that I have with my loved ones. In this manner I guess I hope to open up enough to have a view of the core cause of what about me led to eventually being an unacceptable husband.

Of the many thoughts that I have had on this subject I came to see that my life is too stressful to anyone who lives with me in an intimate manner and increasingly so as times goes on due to what I perceive as my reason for being on earth. Basically I feel that I'm here on earth to discover the missing elements that go beyond the religious teachings that are essential for people to choose to live the social value of love, peace and harmony. Because my investigation goes beyond the acceptable viewpoints of The Creator it causes

conflict in my relationships. I have learned that the regions of awareness that I explore are overwhelming and deeply unsettling to anyone who has to depend at least in part on me to fulfill their needs in a marriage. Specifically these needs are centered around their need for predictability and the accompanying security that this provides. Also, my explorations prevent them from feeling that we can fit into the social environment within which we live. My viewpoints are challenging to the social mores and cause confusion and unease. The outcome of this leads to an increasing difficulty for people to be with me in this intimate manner and to also keep social relationships without having to constantly explain away my state of being. This includes having to explain away my state of being to those in our extended family.

In short. Because I am not willing to cease my journey into my life as I see its meaning and to instead sublimate my drives through acceptable social means, values, and mores, I am really not a suitable candidate for marriage. This is acceptable to me. This is what I've learned about the cause of my marriages dissolution. What I refuse to get over is the regret of the trauma my earlier ignorance caused my children. I never want to get over it and to let it slide into forgetfulness. Though I struggle, remembering this helps me to manage myself in a more mature and accepting manner.

I guess it helps me on some level that none of them have stated that they would rather that they weren't born than to experience me. We have a ways to go. What is common among my children is that they restrict the amount of time they allow me to be with them and my grandchildren. I don't believe that they do this consciously and this causes me anxiety and a great amount of concern. They relate to me in a protective manner, which I realize is good as it can be at this time.

It would give me a deep sense of relief should they become conscious of their treatment with me. To date I haven't discovered a good way of approaching this topic and so I feel that the work of learning to live with our experiences of this kind of trauma isn't concluded. To keep me on course my subconscious brings it up to me and it hurts me and this is what really I am sharing with my roommate. Thankfully my children who are now adults and have children of their own are willing to relate to me at least occasionally. I can handle the pain of being restricted in my contact with them, if not perfectly, at least well enough. Feeling the pain reminds me of the work yet to be done.

Now back to the conversation. I shared with my roommate that I definitely feel her concern for me when I periodically share my frustration, disappointments and the consequences to the children and their reaction to it as it affects our relationships. Yet it is challenging to relate that the kind of pain that I experience isn't one of just an event in the past, rather it is one that continues each time I spend with my children and I experience their reticence to spend more than the bare minimum of time in my presence. This brought me to share with her that for me "Getting over it and getting on with life" isn't the correct way to communicate her concern. Rather to me, I would be more receptive and it would be more supportive to hear her say something like, "I appreciate and respect your willingness to continue to be willing to feel the impact of these past occurrences and their ongoing ripple affect. I do admire how you are able to be involved with your ex-wives and children as they allow so that you are able to be there for them and for your grandchildren."

Definitely, venting the emotional outcome of my pain with her is a relief. Hopefully, over time I am improving in my willingness and ability to explore the affect

of this situation and to better communicate the kind of support that is a benefit to me. For me, writing about our interchange on the subject of getting over it and letting go helps me incorporate the intuitive dynamics of our conversation. I hope they are helpful to her as well.