

Your Life Is Not Your Circumstances

"Life sucks!" We often hear this from people. Do they really mean that? Would they prefer death, then? Likely not. What they are complaining about are the circumstances of life. Clearly, life and circumstances are very different things, yet, most folks fail to make the distinction.

The good news: we can make the distinction. Certainly, sometimes, life is painful, difficult and complicated as my partner, Charles, frequently points out. There is no Pollyanna lens that can change that. Where our power lies is in focusing on what we do want rather than wallowing in what we don't! We are in charge of what we think about, talk about and do. That's the truth.

There is a very good reason that I wrote the book, *What You Pay Attention to Expands*. Because it is true. It is not that we do not recognize when less than wonderful things are happening to us. It's not that we live in a box and pretend the world is not going on around us and it's often not pretty. That's easy to acknowledge. The big question is: What are you going to do with what you see, hear, sense, feel and think? What are you doing WITH it? You decide. You choose. You determine.

Your life is not your circumstances. Working with a coaching client recently, I knew she desperately wanted me to sympathize with her helplessness in the face of her job loss and simultaneous end of her relationship of five years. You might be thinking that would be the natural thing to do, after all neither of those things are pleasant experiences to walk through. At first, they even may seem insurmountable.

The world is an awful place.

How could they do that to me?

How could he be so callous, rude, mean & thoughtless?

How am I going to make a living?

I'll be a homeless bag lady in no time.

Nobody loves me. I'm going out to eat worms.

Why?

Because life sucks!

Familiar with the script? It is a downward spiral into a waiting abyss and all she could do was wail, rail and curtail any thoughts of an improved future. Sure, a little wallow at the beginning was acceptable. Get the anger out. Say out loud what you would have preferred saying to both the employer and the boyfriend. Cry some. Yell some. Make those horrible noises that come from deep places. And, give yourself a time limit for all that gnashing of teeth, an hour, a day, a week tops!

"These were events, remember, not a lifestyle. These are circumstances, not who you are. You are bigger than this. You are wise, expansive and able to see beyond today," I told her. Her first response, "Yeah, but...." We have to get beyond our yeah-but's...and fast!

There's a little issue here: when seemingly nasty, unprovoked events happen--of course, little ol' us had nothing to do with these events, right?--we run often to the very people who will sympathize and join with us in our indignation that folks treated us badly. We want people to catastrophize with us, join in the chorus of "Ain't it awful? and He done me wrong." Some folks in my client's situation would go straight to the most dramatic person they knew so they could count on the biggest reaction. They would make a meal of this degradation for weeks!

Now, there is a big difference between sympathy and empathy.

....Sympathy: a relationship in which whatever affects one person
.....similarly affects the other.

That's not so useful to engage in. Instead of one person in despair,
we now have two or more!

....Empathy: the action of understanding, being aware of, being
.....sensitive to the feelings, thoughts and experience of
.....another person.

That could be more useful. I can see you in the pit. I remember how it felt when I was in that pit. I'm not jumping in to wallow with you. That's empathy. Big difference.

A Course in Miracles says that whoever is most sane is responsible for the relationship. If we both jump into the pit and writhe around, who's sane? Who will hold the sanity? Who will know the truth and the course towards a broader, more expansive understanding of what life can be? Steer away from drama. Engaging though it is, it is an amazing energy drain with absolutely no useful purpose.

Your life is NOT your circumstances. You decide how to respond to circumstances and create the life you most want and value. What will you do to remember this?

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