

AN ANESTHETIZED LIFE ISN'T WORTH LIVING

I celebrated Martin Luther King Day by seeing the improbable, technically flawed movie, 'The Bucket List'. Billionaire Edward Cole, poor in life's loves, and blue collar family man Carter Chambers, unaware of his true richness, are cancer patients given a year to live. Together they embark on a hyperbolized journey of last fling adventures, Hollywood style. They learn joy is a visit best bestowed on others, acknowledge their pain and decide to live; while dying.

Embracing our deepest pains was poignantly portrayed in another film, the 1989 Gene Rodenberry movie, "Star Trek; The Final Frontier". The renegade Vulcan Shaman, Sybok, in search of a mythical galactic residence of GOD called Shakaree, kidnaps the Starship "Enterprise". One by one, Sybok's mesmerizes folks into believing he has freed them from their deepest pains and successfully builds up a cult-like Jim Jones following.

Sybok turns to the Enterprise Commander, Capt. Kirk and offers to release his indubitable pain. Kirk's response is, "I don't want my pain taken away! I need my pain!" In classic Rodenberry moralizing metaphor, we learn there is no Shakaree or an analgesic so tempting that it is worth missing the journey of life. The movie proclaims a bitter- sweet necessity of life; pain. It is a lesson poet and parents, prophets and prostitutes and anyone with a bit of time at the dance knows well.

We all clutch to one or a few talents, possessions, or people as most precious; a slugger's magnificent swing, fortunes, a body that could suck the chrome off a trailer hitch, power, position or prestige. However, no experience steels us more than when what we truly prize most is thought to be surely lost forever; hope and joy are gone and yet unforeseen, we rise from the ashes anew. Pain may then be a messenger pointing to perseverance as our path. As is true that without gravity, bones will grow thin and weak; without stress and pain, passion and progress in life are not assured.

Calamity can bring clarity. Those struck blind may not recover eyesight, but perhaps will find new insight. Those made penniless may not ever again wade in wealth; but perhaps they may bathe in a richness of the soul. In this mortal coil we will all have ample opportunity to gain through pain the lessons of adversity.

Nothing anchors the soul like having stared in the face of death and called it a liar or having taken off death's mask and called it teacher. Life presents us constantly with teachable moments, but it is the painful ones, the ones that threaten to rip your heart that we fear the most and from which we take too little. Knowing you somehow held on is one of the most precious jewels that can crown your reign. And you are wiser. If we learn, pain is prologue for a richer life. If others learn from those who suffer, they are armed to forebear when it is their turn. Dr. King knew all of this.

The pain free life is a delusional disaster one will never enjoy. However, resurrection from utter despair is everything it is cracked up to be thus I recommend "dying" at least once before it is all over.

Pain galvanizes memories and cements the soul. It is the welcome price of our dance card to the fais dodo of life.

We have a culture addicted to analgesia and the unbridled pursuit of immediate relief from some presumably intolerable ache that is “just killing us.” Beware; the pursuit of an anesthetized life is really just living to die.

I recommend honoring those who embrace pain and risk dying to live. Such is the stuff of heroes. As Lee Ann Womack so beautifully sang... “And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance” Listen at tonydeaf.org

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