

OPTIMISM

It was Antoine de Saint Exupéry who famously wrote that *Love doesn't require two people look at one another, but that they look together in the same direction.*

I was reminded of this saying recently when I was sent one of those catch-all send-to-the-world emails that contain sardonic humour, a sprinkling of philosophical truth and (sometimes) a bit of titillation on the side. But it got me thinking – something I'm more used to doing at 3 in the morning, rather than at 3 in the afternoon, if the truth be told – about how much we take for granted, and at how the sudden loss of that something we took for granted can have such a devastating effect on our lives.

We've all experienced deep tragedies, some more than others, admittedly; but in a way that's not the point. Why should we, after all, be concerned with the depth of tragedy which strikes with such ferocity at the most unexpected (and dare one say, inconvenient) of times?

And yet, in the same way that *Every cloud has a silver lining*, maybe we shouldn't feel so negative about such tragedies. The loss of a close friend or family member can be devastating. But how often at the funeral service do we hear the exhortation *Don't cry because a life is over celebrate the fact that it happened*. It is, in effect, seeing the good side of something that on the surface can be so upsetting.

Have you ever felt really upset about something? I mean something that has made you feel angry or hurt or just plain upset? And then when you try to explain your feelings to someone else a few days later, somehow it doesn't appear to be so bad now and you wonder why you were so upset at the time. What is basically happening is the *can't see the wood for the trees syndrome*. Sometimes we are so close to the tragedy that we can't take a step or two back and see it for what it really is. We cannot place it in context.

At one stage I used to keep a diary (sbth don't tell anybody) not your run-of-the-mill 'Dear Diary...today I got out of bed and....' No. Not that type. This was a *Disaster Diary*. It didn't matter how big or small a disaster it was, before I went to bed I would record everything that had gone wrong that day; everything that had upset me; everything that I had wanted to achieve but had failed at in the attempt. In short, it was a catalogue of failure; of dashed hopes; of unfulfilled dreams. The most amazing thing was that whereas when it started, it might have been three or four days perhaps even longer before I realised how insignificant in the overall scheme of things this little upset was, as time progressed, that three or four day spell gradually lessened until I was able to see clearly the 'tragedy' for what it was the moment I had thought long enough to record it on paper... little upset that had no right to affect my life in such a negative way.

And I swear that if anything it played a major role in making me a happier and more

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contented person. Rather than wallow in *We seldom think of what we have, but always think of what we miss*, I found myself veering towards the *He who would like to have something he never had, will have to do something well, that he hasn't done yet* side of life.

That doesn't mean we can, nor should, be devoid of feelings. But we can look for the good things all around us. As Bing Crosby famously crooned *You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative and don't mess with Mr in between*. It's the same with that film *Yes Man* that was recently released, starring Jim Carrey. The theme centres around a negative guy who makes a covenant to start saying yes to things, rather than finding the negative in everything, and thereby transforms his life for the better.

Sometimes, though, we still need the help of friends to give us encouragement as it can be all too easy to wallow in self pity and it can be difficult to extricate ourselves from the depths of despair. *Everybody sees how you seem, however, only some know who you are* is to apt. And *The one who takes your hand but touches your heart is a true Friend* – well, never was a truer word said. Friends are there when the going gets tough. They stand by you through thick and thin and it is during the testing times that you find out who your true friends really are.

Overall, since those days of my disaster diary, I have had a happier life. Sure I still get upset. Who doesn't? But I can more easily put things into perspective and see that overall, it's a pretty terrific time we have here on this earth. Who was it who said we all should aim to roll up to St Peter at the pearly gates, glass of champagne in one hand, bowl of strawberries in the other, saying *Goee what a ride!*

Remember, if you never have the bad times you will never appreciate the good times. So next time disaster strikes, stupid as it may sound, try saying to yourself *Thank you Lord for giving me the chance to appreciate everything that's great in life*. It could be just the tonic you need!

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