

A Leadership Opportunity

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Our Sense Of Identity Matters

Who we are guides the choices we make in our life that lead to both our failures and our successes. This sense of identity involves the things that we use to define not just ourselves but life itself. We define what it means to be alive, what life is, what it means, what alternative action would mean, all of that. We create this stream of meaning in which we swim through life. Sometimes our swimming is strong and graceful as we move rapidly to where we want to go. Other times we struggle against the current of meaning just to keep our heads above water. I was recently reminded of the following story.

An aging Hindu master grew tired of his apprentice complaining, and so, one morning, sent him for some salt. When the apprentice returned, the master instructed the unhappy young man to put a handful of salt in a glass of water and then to drink it.

"How does it taste?" the master asked.

"Bitter," spit the apprentice.

The master chuckled and then asked the young man to take the same handful of salt and put it in the lake. The two walked in silence to the nearby lake, and once the apprentice swirled his handful of salt in the water, the old man said, "Now drink from the lake."

As the water dripped down the young man's chin, the master asked, "How does it taste?"

"Fresh," remarked the apprentice.

"Do you taste the salt?" asked the master.

"No," said the young man.

At this, the master sat beside this serious young man who so reminded him of himself and took his hands, offering, "The pain of life is pure salt; no more, no less. The amount of pain in life remains the exactly the same. However, the amount of bitterness we taste depends on the container we put the pain in. So when you are in pain, the only thing you can do is to enlarge your sense of things . . . Stop being a glass. Become a lake."

How do you work with meaning in your life so that you can increase the space in which you swim through meaning to learn from your failures and your successes?

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As republished in COACH TO COACH NETWORK (C2CN) NEWSLETTER John G. Agno, Newsletter Editor & Business Coach info@CoachThee.com 734.426.2000

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