

## **The Power of Meaning**

In February I rented the movie "The Notebook". Besides being a sweet, poignant movie, it pointed to some deeper truths about the power of having your story told. This desire is so deeply part of the human psyche that if you sensitize yourself to it you will see it everywhere. We often sit through stories of terrible times in book, movie or TV form because of the unspoken agreement that at the end there will be a larger meaning, whether happy or profound. This is driven by a deep-seated need for meaning in our lives and existence. Those who cannot connect to deeper meaning during times of trouble are far more prone to depression and addiction.

Where does this need for meaning come from? Some say that it is God seeking to know him/herself. Others say we invent God to satisfy this need. However, the ability to find meaning comes out of the ability to witness the story we are part of, and that begins early in life. During the first 1 to 2 years of life there is the development of the Orbitofrontal Cortex, an area of the brain that is referred to as the height of the limbic system - the emotional centers of the brain. Among other things, the Orbitofrontal Cortex allows us to be capable of witnessing our experience of life and our emotions rather than being enmeshed or immersed in them. It allows us to have a wider perspective on our life experiences, giving us power of meaning.

However, the development of the Orbitofrontal Cortex is dependent upon a healthy attachment experience with our primary caregiver during that critical brain-developing first 2 years of life. Sadly for many of us, difficult early life experiences have not allowed for the development of this witness part of the brain. We find it difficult to perceive meaning in our life because that ability to have a wider perspective is diminished. The deep pessimism of my teenage years is one simple example of how this can manifest. (See "Affect Regulation and the Repair of the Self" - Allan Schore)

Fortunately the brain can heal - the Orbitofrontal Cortex can develop. A good healer who understands these things makes a world of difference. A good healer helped me with this when I was younger and now I help others heal this part of their brain as a normal course in my healing arts.

You can help yourself build your own witness consciousness. Basic Zen Meditation, also called mindfulness meditation, is a deceptively simple and powerful way to heal. .

I've derived another tool for accessing the power of meaning from a good book I recently read called "The Art of Possibility" (Zander). In it the authors talk about giving yourself an "A" ahead of time. Here's an example. Let's say you perceive that ahead of you lies a difficult patch. Now imagine yourself at the other end of the difficult patch giving yourself an "A" grade for how you got through it - but take the time to imagine all the great things that you did which earned you the "A". In essence you are, before it even happens, witnessing, casting the power of meaning, and telling the story.

So the next time a friend tells you the story of their life, notice how you listen. Can you be present and witness? It's not always easy, even for experienced healers. Remember that you can always ask spirit for help.

If there were anything I could wish for all of us at the end of life's journey, it would be for each of us to have a chance to tell our story to a compassionate witness - and receive the standing ovation we deserve.

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