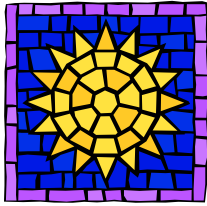


## ADJUSTING MEANS INTEGRATING



Human beings as a species have always been task oriented. It's through the completion of tasks that we've gotten to where we are today. We are natural builders, sowers and reapers. But maybe we've gone overboard. We run ourselves ragged trying to do "a million things" every day. We go to bed feeling on edge because, not only do we have to finish what we didn't get done today, but there are another million things waiting for us tomorrow.

Each and every accomplishment opens up the world a little more and reveals even more possibility. With every task that is accomplished a hundred more are made visible. Today we want to seize the opportunity to do them all because task completion leads to success. So we've had to speed up to keep pace. What we have created is a very busy, fast-paced, competitive world.

This is not a bad thing but there is a danger here. What is happening to the heart? When something happens that breaks the heart society's most pervasive expectation is that we will adjust. This is perfectly reasonable. If human beings didn't have the extraordinary ability to adapt that we most certainly do have, we all would have died off in our caves and that would have been the end of the story.

The problem isn't the expectation that we adjust. The problem is what we've chosen to make adjustment mean. Language is a living thing. It evolves in concert with the continuous change and growth of society. It is society's mirror, and in it we see reflected the current trends, beliefs and values of the day. In this day, adjustment is understood as a task to be completed as quickly as possible.

The danger is that an intolerance of suffering lies just under our frenetic push to get things done. There is almost a hatred of suffering. And so the heart breaks even more. When life brings us a change that upsets and saddens us the prescription is to get over it. We are to put it behind us and get on with life. When we conform and smile bravely we are praised for adjusting well. We are admired.

We conspire together in a silent shunning of suffering and agree that the best strategy is to stick the broken heart back together. Just tape it up and carry on. In time though, the tape will dry up and lose its adhesive quality. It will fall off and the heart will speak again in the sounds of it breaking apart once more.

The danger is that our obsession with task completion tempts us to look at life as a series of individual events that happen, last for a while, and end. We live in the era of the sound byte. Even if we see life more accurately as a chain of events, we are tempted to see it as so loosely strung together that we can snap it apart and remove the ugly parts with ease.

We are tempted to make believe that when we discard the nasty bits into the past we move them out of existence. But the events and experiences of life are inextricably interconnected and interrelated. They are held together for all time. No matter how many years fall between them they all weave together in a magnificent tapestry-in-the-making called your life.

If we chose to honour suffering we would see that when we try to cut the dark strands out we steal from the richness and beauty of the whole creation. Without them the weaving is incomplete. We can never fully appreciate its glory. We can never fully grasp its wondrous complexity. We can never deeply know this other person.

If we chose to understand adjustment as a continuous process of assimilating and integrating everything that happens to us, and our lives as the fascinating mosaic we create through this process, we would have reverence for suffering and handle it with tender care. We would have patience for the process and the time it takes to weave the dark colours in with the bright. We would honour each other by supporting the reality of our sad moments as we carry on with each day. This is the way we create lasting happiness. This is how we move toward wholeness.

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