Grief can be a Vehicle for Growth

Question: Sadhguru, you were telling us how one can either come out broken or come out wiser from calamities. Can you elaborate on how sadness can be a means of growth?

Sadhguru: Most people do not know what it means for misery to strike in the form of life. But for certain people, when it really strikes, everything that they valued in their life is taken away, and a deep sadness settles. There are many ways to handle this sadness. Some people just sit in a corner and drive themselves mad, making everyone miserable. There are others, who when they become sad, find a way of doing some useful work. Usually, it is people who have been hurt like this who become great karma yogis in their lives.

Let me give you an example. There was a certain person who was a teacher in a primary school in Maharashtra. He lived in a village just off the Sahyadri Mountains with his wife and two children. Then, some dreadful disease took his wife and children, and he was left totally alone. The man was shattered because his whole life was built around those three people. He was on the verge of madness. He simply did not know what to do, so he just walked off into the Sahyadri Mountains and sat there.

He remembered these mountains as they were when he was a child. They used to be green and full of trees. Now, when he was walking in the mountains, it was barren, hot, and unbearable. He sat there for many days, picking fruits and nuts, eating them and just being there.

After some time, he decided that only because this mountain had become barren, his life had been made barren. Whether it is true or not is not the point. He decided to do something about this. He lived there like a saint, single-handedly picked up seeds wherever they fell from the trees, and without anybody’s support, planted about four lakh trees and made them grow. He saw them through for 25 years. Today, four lakh trees are standing on the Sahyadri Mountains because of this one man. He is a yogi, though nobody taught him any yoga.

From Sadness to Compassion: One can make any emotion into a creative force in their life. There is no negativity in the existence. We may think something is negative and something else is positive, but a light burns because of negative and positive wires together. Negative is not something to get rid of. It is as important as the positive. If your sadness reminds you that you are incomplete, it is good. Make use of your sadness to grow.

When sadness sets in, if you become more compassionate, more caring, and more loving, you have some sense in you. When you get sad, if you get irritable and angry and think that the whole world is wrong, you are a fool. At that moment, if someone meddles with you, your sadness can very easily become anger. Will you make this sadness into anger or will you make this sadness into love and compassion? It is very easy to become compassionate when you are sad.

Learning to use all your emotions creatively is very important. It is not just happiness that is important. If you have not known sadness, you will not mature. Only if you have known sadness and pain, you can be a mature person. Otherwise you will never understand what is happening with you, nor will you understand what is happening with anyone else around you.

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