

## Self-awareness

A client of mine, after a devastating heart-break says, *“I find the world full of misery and the human life is filled with suffering and pain. I think there is no point of living a life filled with pain, misery and suffering. Is there a life called the happy life?”* Before I could respond to his question, he affirmed saying, *“I really don’t believe there can be a happy life. People who say they are happy are just lying to themselves. The truth is that they hide their suffering and want to show themselves as what they are not. I feel it’s better to not carry on with such a life. I wish I could end my life sooner than later than going through such endless suffering.”*

I believe most of us have had such experiences in our lives too. Either we might have heard someone saying what my client expressed or we ourselves might have been through such experience of hopelessness or meaninglessness at some point in our lives. The question being - *“Is the client right in what s/he believes or is s/he not aware of the reality that is beyond her/his suffering?”* Most of us will agree that he is just overshadowed by the painful relationship breakup and therefore is not able to see the reality that- an individual does have the capacity to experience happiness, joy, peace, calmness, serenity, etc.

The reality behind every suffering or happiness is the way we let our thoughts occupy our mind with controllable or uncontrollable thoughts. In reality, the mind is constantly thinking and is occupied with thoughts both positive and negative which are impregnated with meanings given by an individual in relation with the experience one has with the ecological system. Unfortunately, at times, the peace of mind is overshadowed by the traumatic experience and the mind, in the midst of traumatic events, is deceived to perceive the reality as it is and then get influenced by the destructive and self-harming thoughts. Buddha says, *“Such disquieted and unstill mind can find no peace, just as there is no rest for the waves of the sea”* (Nanasamvara,

1961, p. 5). This is the time, the war between life and death-wish begins. Some, under the shadow of trauma, fail to see the reality and go through extreme levels of seeing life as a meaningless existence.

Is there a way out? Of course yes, there are many ways. One of the most effective ways of dealing with the situation, first and foremost, is through self-awareness. Self-awareness is one of the greatest aspects of human faculty to bring life under control. For the effective functioning of the self, the concept of self-awareness is emphasized as the capacity of becoming the object of one's own attention (De Mello, 1992). It is also described as "*the ability to identify and recognize emotions; gather accurate self-perceptions; recognize strengths, needs, and values; have a sense of self-efficacy; and develop a sense of spirituality*" (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010, p. 9).

The development of awareness appears to facilitate healing from trauma and to find constructive solutions to crises (Ayduk & Kross' study as cited in Ardel & Grunwald, 2018). Awareness of self, others, and the environment is pivotal to obtain the full range of human knowledge and actions that are necessary to restore a crisis-ridden world (Kelly's study as cited in Ardel & Grunwald, 2018).

There is a story about some people who were living on the bank of the river, the river water was dirty and not potable. Hence, the people of that region had to walk miles away to bring water for their daily needs. They used to think how unlucky they are for they live by the river side but are unable to use the water for their needs. One day, a gentleman arrives in their village and observes all the activities carried out by them. Looking at the effort taken by the people to bring water, he was bewildered and wondered why these people struggle to bring water from such a distant place while water was already available at their feet. He decided to help them find water

nearby. So, he called all the villagers and dug a well at a distance of just 100 feet away from the bank of the river. The villagers, to their surprise found a fresh, clean and potable water springing from the well and they were grateful to him. Similarly, we are surrounded with joy, happiness, peace, love and so on. Most of them have no idea of how to draw a spring of joy, peace or love from their surrounding environment. This is because they are brainwashed, mesmerized, asleep and unaware (De Mello, 1992).

Rise from slumber, open the eyes to perceive the triggers as they are and view the objective reality. Take on a new way of seeing things, not as one wishes to be but things as they are. At times, one is put under wrong notion of believing people and things as the ultimate source of joy and happiness. But sometimes, to their dismay, people realize that all that seems to be the source of joy is just trading the very purpose and joy of life as we have seen in the case above. The important thing is to become aware of the fact that one can easily be blinded and influenced by the triggered emotions and so the reasoning capacity begins to diminish. The consequence is that ideas about people, things, concepts and so forth become messed up and one begins to believe what is real as unreal and what is unreal as real. For instance, the mind that is predominantly influenced with the soothing or mesmerizing words or acts of a lover incline to see every activity of a lover as pleasant, perfect, good, appealing, pleasing and fails to see the negative side of the act. Even if something is not really that good, one assumes it to be very good because he or she is compelled by the unbalanced reasonable thoughts and feelings. (De Mello, 1992)

During the moments of emotional disturbances or traumas, one requires not physical energy or strength or not even intelligence (De Mello, 1992) but one thing that is needed is readiness to become aware of the sleepy mood, being aware that you are not being in touch with reality, getting to know that your life at this moment is influenced by the wrong perception, ideas,

believes and more importantly seeking for support and guidance from professionals in order to get in touch with reality.

With adequate awareness of oneself gained by self-effort or support of professionals, it is important to respond to the external triggers adequately – socially and morally acceptable manner and thereby produce effective results in managing life as a whole. Richardson and Shupe say that “*awareness of our primary emotional triggers improves our chances of making rational decisions based on conscious choice, rather than unconscious emotional conditioning*” (Richardson and Shupe, 2003, 9). When the disposition of one’s own self is in tune with the exchange of imaginations with facts, dreams with realities, unconscious with conscious and so on, the life begins to find its way toward a life – a life that is filled with serenity, joy, peace, happiness and all that you wish for.

**-Mr. Balaswamy**

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