

ACCEPTING REALITY

There is one writer whom I deeply respect. His name is Viktor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist who survived the Nazi death camps during World War II. In his book, "Man's Search for Meaning," Dr. Frankl writes:

"We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a helpless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement.

"When we are no longer able to change a situation [just think of an incurable disease such as inoperable cancer] we are challenged to change ourselves... In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds meaning."

When we refuse to accept ugly reality that has dire consequences, we continue to suffer, but even more deeply. Our lack of acceptance puts a severe strain on us and adds to our pain. We have known of persons who continue to run into walls because they won't accept that the walls exist.

The woman whose lover has walked away, but who waits for him to return even when all evidence points to him never coming back, is only adding to her pain by plugging into denial.

What's necessary is for us to make some personal changes when reality will not budge. So your father did not love you when you were a child. You can't get over it. You are bitter and angry and you spit on his grave. But that changes nothing of the past. Meanwhile, your present relationship is hurting because your anger is out of control and spilling over into the heart of your beloved. She is an innocent victim of your displaced anger, and because of this she is thinking of saying goodbye to you. You are allowing your father to drive a wedge between you and the woman you love.

When you cannot change reality, you need to adjust to it. You need to do the changing if you are to find a measure of happiness in the midst of unpleasantness and even pain.

Like what Frankl says, "In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds meaning."

I am reminded of a man who has an autistic child. Autism isn't easy to handle, yet somehow, some way, the dad has found meaning in the situation. He loves his son and clearly enjoys him despite the very difficult circumstances he has to deal with. There is no sign of depression or regret of any kind. The man has found meaning in the autism of his son. He has made changes in his own life, which have helped him to deal with the pain and the hardships that caring for an autistic child entail.

There is a lesson for us here. It is all about looking reality in the eyes and doing the best we can, for as long as we can, and with all that we have. If it means making adjustments, then so be it.