

## *From the Kitchen*

14 September 2011



In the previous post I talked of a bushfire being a circumstance to which you respond with choices. If your choice was to leave and your house burns down, do you ‘blame’ anyone or anything? Finding your house burnt down on your return is ‘the next experience’ you have moved on to and this ‘next experience’ becomes the current circumstance (symptom) to which you have an opportunity to respond.

Using the word ‘symptom’ like this is not too farfetched. When used in a medical context, a symptom is the manifestation of something – it is the result of an underlying process. A particular symptom (e.g. red, blotchy skin) can be the result of any one of a number of underlying causes. How you or your doctor respond to the symptom depends on what you decide is the cause. Even when the cause is known, there is usually more than one way of dealing with it – anything from doing nothing and letting your body deal with it to aggressively attacking the symptom or the cause with a drug.

In the situation of the bushfire, your ‘symptom’ can be defined as the dangerous situation of you in your house in the path of the fire. As with the red blotchy skin, you can deal with this in a number of ways, from doing nothing to marshalling all your resources to fight the fire.

To me the most important aspect of this whole scenario is the question, “How do you respond to what happens?” Actually, this is really a string of questions.

“How do you respond to:

- news of the fire;
- the approaching fire;
- being away from your home, if you evacuated, with the fire possibly threatening it;
- confronting the fire, if you didn’t evacuate, when it gets to your home;
- having saved your home;
- the loss of your home?”

I remember one man being shown on television, returning to where his house had been after the Sydney bushfires in December 2004. He was shocked and very upset at first. Then he talked about how this would be a new adventure for him, that it was an opportunity for renewal. This was someone who clearly responded to the destruction of his home in a way which is different from most people’s responses. My guess is that he would perhaps find it easier than most people in similar circumstances to recover from the loss.

I want to return to the question I asked earlier about whether you would blame anyone. Do you blame any person or thing for the results of your choices in the circumstances of the bushfire? If you do blame, how do you chose where to attach blame? Does the blaming come out of a sense of helplessness? I suggest that in blaming, you are giving away some of your power, because you believe that you lacked power in the circumstances. If you were to take full responsibility for your choices and accept those things you believed you had no

power to change, then you are able to respond more effectively, more powerfully, the next time you are having to make choices. You are response-able.

Returning to Paul Solomon's definition of perfect health (see previous post), note that he says that perfect health is the natural ability to experience the symptoms you most need at any given moment. This reflects his world view, his cosmology. Could this be a useful way of looking at the world? It implies that we need symptoms (circumstances, things happening to us) in order to be healthy. It implies that we are meant to be learning, because responding to something teaches us, gives us experience. It allows us to make better (more useful) choices, next time those circumstances come around.

The definition finishes with the suggestion that health involves moving on to the next set of circumstances. In other words, not to get stuck in what has happened (the past) but to be present to what is there right now.

How do you respond to this definition and the discussion of it? Your response will tell you a lot about how you see the world. And there is no right or wrong way of seeing the world. There are no right or wrong beliefs. Your beliefs, your views, your choices are all yours, but they do dictate how you move through life and how you respond.

*[to be continued in next post]*