

From the Kitchen

7 September 2011



If you blame your current circumstances on the choices made by others, what power do you give yourself in your life?

Governments make laws without directly consulting you. Even if you voted for the current government, it may make laws which you don't like. There is not much you can do to change that, although there may be if you are determined enough. The point is that the laws of the land are circumstances not really of your making. They are the environment in which you live, as the weather is; they are your circumstances. There are a number of things you can do about those circumstances. You can simply lump it and get on with things, with or without complaining. You can shelter from it – from the politics, the law, the weather. You can move to some place with a different (political or climatic) environment. You can find ways of making use of the circumstances.

There is an apocryphal story of two salesmen sent by a shoe manufacturer to a country in Africa. The first salesman reported back to his boss, "No-one wears shoes here. I'm coming back home." The second salesman reported back, "No-one wears shoes here. Send more shoes."

The literature is full of stories of people who have refused to bow to their circumstances. People who suffered horrendous injuries and refused to take their doctors' prognosis that they would never walk again. One example is Janine Shepherd, an Australian cross-country skier who was run over by a truck while riding a bike. Her injuries included a broken neck and a broken back. Her parents were told that Janine was not expected to survive her ordeal and that even if, by some small chance, she recovered, she would never walk again. She made the decision not to accept this and learned to fly. Within a year she had a private pilot's license and ended up with an instructor's license in aerobatics.¹

Of course you can say that not everyone is blessed with that sort of bloody-mindedness or determination and maybe she had the sort of support that others wouldn't have, etc., etc. But that is more circumstance. Janine's story is an example of the attitude that it is not what happens to you that is important, but what you do with what happens to you. And that is a choice you make.

What choices are you making about your circumstances? Are you taking responsibility for the way your life works or does not work?

Taking responsibility is about being able to respond – respond to your circumstances and to what happens to you. You could say that it is about response-ability.

There is a definition of perfect health which includes a person's ability to respond to circumstances:

*Perfect health is the natural ability of any soul to experience precisely the symptoms that it most needs at any given moment, to respond to those symptoms and move on to the next experience.*²

For the purpose of this discussion, I choose to interpret the term ‘symptoms’ very broadly, to include all circumstances a person may have to deal with. I have previously hinted that, perhaps, the reality around us is a product of our thoughts, of the way we see the world. Some people would even go so far as to say that the world around us is entirely a product of our thoughts and beliefs.

To go back to the definition above, ‘perfect health’ can be taken as our overall physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. In other words, the way we are in the world. Ill-health can be seen as an impaired ability or total inability to deal with some aspect of the world. Physical diseases are often caused by outside agents (bacteria, viruses) and our immune system is designed to deal with these. When it doesn’t do so adequately, we become ill. Some mental ill-health can also be seen as an inability to deal with the world in such a way that a person is no longer able to cope.

I am not saying here that things don’t happen to people. I am urging you to change the way you think about this.

Bushfires are an ‘external’ event; external in the sense that they happen without your intervention. If a bushfire approaches your house, it is unlikely that you will simply sit on your couch and ignore the danger. You will make a choice. You may leave the area to avoid the bushfire entirely or you may decide to stay and protect your house. If you decide to leave, you need to do so early enough not to be overtaken by the fire. If you stay, you would presumably only do so if you are well prepared to do what is needed to protect yourself and your house.

The bushfire creates circumstances to which you respond. How you respond depends on choices you have made in the past and choices you will make moment by moment. Your ability to do well in this situation depends on your responses.

1. See her first book: *Never Tell Me Never*, Pan Macmillan, 1994.
2. Paul Solomon in a lecture in the 1970s.

[to be continued in next post]