

A Framework for Inner Peace

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Almost everyone would like answers to some of the really tough questions life makes us ask.

- *Why do bad things happen to good people?*
- *Why do people die when they are still needed?*
- *Why is there suffering in the world?*

Through the integration of a number of my own personal beliefs, I have found answers that have helped me to accept these things.

I would like to share them with you here in the hopes that you may find solace in your own life, or at least find some partial answers that may help you to understand life's tragedies and why they may occur.

I will first layout the foundations of my personal belief system, and then tie them all together to show how they support each other and help to make sense out of life's apparent misfortunes and enable you to look at them in a positive light.

A Foundation of Beliefs

My personal beliefs lay on the foundation of the following concepts:

- **Existence of a Physical Body:** The belief that your physical body does actually physically exist. (For you hard-core philosophers that believe their physical body does not actually exist, translate this to mean "your perception that your physical body exists".)
- **Existence of a Soul:** In addition to your physical body, you have (or rather "are") a soul. Your soul is the unique collection and arrangement of energy that comprises your consciousness and exists separate, but inter-related, with your physical body. The soul is the "true you" while the physical body is primarily a physical vessel for the soul to reside in while incarnated.
- **Permanence of the Soul:** When your physical body dies, your soul, your consciousness, continues to exist. This allows for the soul's consciousness to extend beyond a single physical incarnation in a physical body.
- **Reincarnation:** This is the belief that your soul can (and usually does) inhabit multiple physical bodies over multiple lifetimes. Your soul will reincarnate repeatedly until you have learned all the lessons you need to learn.
- **Reason for Existence:** I believe that you exist for a reason, whatever that reason may be. I personally believe that this reason is two-fold. 1) God/Universe seeks to know itself better through us all. 2) We all seek to be reunited with God/Universe as a single consciousness.
- **Learning Process:** As you try to achieve your Reason for Existence, you experience various trials and tribulations along the way. You seek to solve your problems and overcome your limitations in this process. This can not usually be done in a single lifetime, so you reincarnate until you have learned the lessons you need.
- **Spiritual Contract:** Before your soul incarnates, you select the experiences you want to go through, and the lessons you want to learn through these experiences. The acceptance of "going through this collection of experiences" is what is referred to as a "Spiritual Contract". It is called this to illustrate the desire and acceptance of your soul to go through this course of action in your next incarnation. Barring a dramatic conscious intentional change during your lifetime, your soul will go through the desired experiences (often repeatedly) until the desired

lessons are learned. The important aspect of this contract is that you have consciously agreed to endure the trials you will face in this lifetime. You are not a victim. You are doing exactly what you came here to do.

- **Final Goal:** It appears that the driving force in the Universe as we experience it is attraction. People long to be with united or re-united with loved ones. People long to be "One with Spirit". There is a natural tendency for people to desire a spiritual component in their lives. Whatever this Final Goal may be, I believe that there is something that we are all moving, evolving towards. I don't claim to know what it will be, but feel free to take your pick from whichever religions' goals you feel attuned to and put it here.

Now that we have laid the foundation, let's start building upon it.

If you're reading this, you are most likely incarnated in a physical body and are working on the "Learning Process" stage as described above. If not, you probably don't need to be reading this, but continue if you really want to.

What is Inner Peace

Have you ever been perfectly content, even for a moment? That moment was what Inner Peace feels like.

Inner Peace is what you have when you believe that no matter what happens in life, it is happening for a reason. The reason is a good one, and everything will be better when you are done the current trial.

It is what gives you the courage to continue onward, even though you don't know what is coming, because you have an intuitive sense that it is the right thing to do.

And it is the quiet joy you feel when you emerge from the other side of the situation and have learned the lesson that was designed for you, and you see how the pattern and logic to what you just endured.

And it is the gentle acceptance that there will shortly be another lesson to be learned through another trial, and it will be another opportunity for you to grow.

It is the serenity in the knowledge that whatever the state of the world, it is right where it needs to be right now.

Now that you know what it is, let's describe how you can get it.

Evolution Through Adversity

I'll start off with sort of an odd reference. There was a television series called Babylon 5 that is widely accepted as one of the best science-fiction shows ever made. The major plot line was the epic struggle between "Light" and "Dark" forces to control the destiny of man. The "Light" side was represented by the highly evolved race the Vorlons who would sagely guide man through cryptic statements. The "Dark" side was represented by the mysterious Shadows, which would pop in, destroy everything in an area and then vanish again, spreading fear and chaos through the region. If you want to watch the series, come back and read this after you're done, because I'm going to give away a key plot point in the next paragraph and I wouldn't want to ruin it for you (Tip: rent the DVD's from Netflix.com. The set costs \$360 to purchase the complete five-season series).

You spend the whole story wondering about the Vorlons and worrying about the Shadows. At one point near the end of the series, the main character ends up talking to an agent of the Shadows. The Shadows explain that they are actually trying to help mankind. It is their belief that evolution occurs the fastest in times of trial and war, and that they serve mankind by providing an environment that allows that rapid evolution to happen. They say that the Vorlons believe that evolution is better done slowly through study, meditation and other "peaceful" methods. The seeming difference between Dark and Light in this show actually ends up being merely the manifestations of different ways of "helping us" to evolve.

As a mundane example of this, World War II saw developments in the various sciences in just a few years that would have taken decades (if at all) to accomplish in pre-war times. This was due simply because we primarily needed to advance in order to survive in the face of our enemies.

Darwin's Theory of Evolution also appears to support this behavior. During times of regional or global change, plants and animals are forced to adapt or perish. Those that adapt (either physically or mentally) are stronger for their changes and get to evolve further. Those that are unable to change quickly enough vanish and free up natural resources for the survivors to utilize. If nothing changes, evolution still happens albeit at a much slower pace. It doesn't have to happen quickly as non-evolving species will keep surviving just as well as the evolving ones.

"What does all of this have to do with the tragedies in my life and finding inner peace," you ask? To put it simply, the tragedies in your life are the adversities that force you to evolve as a person. What opportunity does the spoiled child of wealthy parents who has always been handed everything they ever wanted have to grow and evolve as a person? Not much, other than to duplicate what his parents show him. But the child whose parents died when he was young has much more adversity to overcome, and therefore much more opportunity for growth and evolution.

Remember: We Chose Our Lives

This is where the Spiritual Contract comes into play. We each, individually and as groups, chose the lives we wished to lead while we were here. We each have lessons to learn, and we sought out the circumstances that would best allow us to learn these lessons. Then we chose to incarnate into that situation.

As an example, let's take the case of Sarah, a four-year old girl whose parents both died in an auto accident. Before Sarah incarnated, she created a Spiritual Contract that laid out what lessons she wanted to learn, and the kinds of life situation that would best allow her to learn these lessons.

Sarah chose to be born into her family, with the full knowledge (at the soul level, not the physical level) that her parents are planning (according to what is in their Spiritual Contract) to die shortly after she is born. And she chose her family because she has lessons that she wants to learn that will be best learned as an orphan.

Also remember that Sarah's parents chose to die. Perhaps they had already learned the lessons that they came here to learn. Perhaps they chose to die specifically to allow Sarah the opportunity to experience the life of an orphan. Whatever the reason, there is one. It was spelled out in their Spiritual Contracts before they chose to be born. Everybody is doing exactly what they chose to do.

You choose your birth. You choose your family. You choose your life. You choose your death. You choose what to do next.

It is the ultimate expression of Free Will.

A Simple Example

Talk to almost anyone who has lived a hard life, filled with loss, struggle and tragedy. Ask them if they had to do it all over again, what would they change? Would they change the path that made them who they are today?

Almost everybody I have ever asked has said that they wouldn't change a thing, because it made them the stronger individual that they are today.

Of course, some people are still in the middle of one of their challenges, and they may tell you that they would rather not to have to endure their current trial. But ask them again when after they are past it and see if they would still go back and change it.

Would you change the life you lead, and therefore change the person you have become?

This is an example of your innate subtle awareness of your Spiritual Contract. When you are doing what you came here to do, you know it. You might not like it, but if you focus your awareness on "am I where I need to be" you will get a sense of if you are doing something that is meaningful to you or not. Note that I didn't say focus on where you "Want to be" but "Need to be". They are quite often very different.

Though while you are in the trial you may kick and scream and fight and hate it with all your being, when you emerge from the other side having learned the lesson that it was designed to teach you and you reap the benefits, then you will say "Oh, wow! There actually was a good reason that I went through that! Look at what happened as a result of it!"

You will have fulfilled on of your tasks on your Spiritual Contract. It will feel great for a while. You'll enjoy a boon as a result of it.

And then it will start all over again with a new lesson for you to learn.

Repeating Patterns

Often in life we find ourselves going through different variations of the same situation over and over again.

Be alert to notice these patterns in your life. This is an indication that you are in a lesson-learning experience, but you are failing to learn the lesson. Therefore, you keep re-experiencing variations of the same situation repeatedly until you figure out the proper way to handle it.

People often figure "If I ignore this, it will just go away". Sometimes it does. But it will come back in a new form. When it does come back, it usually comes back more and more aggressively each time. If you ignore your lesson enough times, it will basically present you with a situation so severe you will have no alternative but to finally learn it. The goal is to be aware of the patterns in your life that you find, figure out why you keep repeating it, figure out what you need to do to break the pattern, and then DO IT! Without the final "DO IT" stage, it will come back around again.

One of the best ways to identify patterns in your life is to ask friends or family what patterns they see in your life. It is easier for people to see that patterns in someone else's life than in your own. Take your best friend for example. What pattern do they keep repeating in their life. Abusive relationships, can't hold a job for more than three months, drinks too much, runs in the wrong crowd? Now look at your own life in the same light and try to find the patterns that you've been living, and figure out the lesson.

The quicker you can identify the challenge presented to you, the more quickly and easily you can clear the hurdle and get on to your next challenge in life. The more you try to resist the lessons, the longer the process will take and the more uncomfortable the process will be. The lessons will not go away if you try to ignore them. They will just come back in more and more un-ignorable forms until you finally are "forced" to deal with them, as they will reach a point where it appears that the consequences of ignoring the lesson are finally worse than the consequences of just learning it.

Try to spend your energy identifying and then learning your life's lessons. Otherwise you'll spend far more effort trying to push them away and hide from them, only to still have to go through the same lesson in the end.

All The World's A Stage

Why would we choose to incarnate to learn lessons, when we already know what the lesson is we want to learn? Because the difference between knowledge and wisdom is experience. By incarnating, we experience the situation that allows us to learn the wisdom of the lesson through experiencing it.

I know what skydiving is like. You jump out of an airplane from real high up, there's a whole bunch of wind and noise, you fall for a while, pull your ripcord, and then land on the ground with various degrees of force depending on how well you did it all.

However, I have yet to actually experience skydiving, so the above description is rather useless to me in a visceral sense. But I'll bet you twenty dollars that the experience of skydiving is a whole lot different than the knowledge of what skydiving is. And this is where wisdom comes in: wisdom is what you get once you've actually experienced and learned something.

William Shakespeare, in As You Like It (Act II, Scene VII) writes:

All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages...

If you look at this from a soul's perspective, this is quite literally true. We incarnate in order to experience what we need to cultivate wisdom for ourselves. We select the character we will play (who we incarnate as), the plot that will best suit our character's needs (the life situations we are born and grow into) and go through various acts (different parts of our life).

Why did I choose this quote to include in here? Because it is from a famous play, and acting is actually a way of "cheating" the system. The true lure of acting is not that you get to pretend to be somebody else, it is that you can become somebody else. By taking a role and letting yourself really become that character, feeling that character's emotions, thoughts and struggles, you can actually gain the benefit of that character's experience as your own.

The challenge is to separate yourself from the character. You must learn to hide what you know from what your character knows. Sure, you know that there's a guy with pointy knife behind the door who is going to try to get you. But your character doesn't. If you can remove yourself from your character, you can actually experience what your character does as actual counts-in-real-life experience. And from experience can come the wisdom of lessons learned.

Here comes the neat part that ties this all together:

The acting technique of separating "yourself" from "your character" is exactly the same technique your soul uses when you incarnate. Your soul knows what your Spiritual Contract says. But it "hides" that knowledge from your incarnated mind in the same way the actor hides what he knows from the mind of his character. This allows you to experience life in a visceral sense, live the experience and hopefully learn the related lesson.

Applications in Real Life

Okay, that's the theory. Now lets see how it can be applied in real life to provide that sense of Inner Peace that you are looking for.

As we mentioned above, Inner Peace comes from a confidence that everything is happening the way it should, and only good will come of it.

We'll take some sample situations and explain how to find a path to Inner Peace through it.

- *Why do bad things happen to good people?*

Because they want it to happen to them. I can't think of a single "good person" who didn't spend their lives trying to make themselves an even better person. Part of this bettering process is challenging themselves to overcome new obstacles and grow as a result of their struggle.

If nothing "bad" ever challenged them, they would be denied the opportunity to grow and become even better. "What does not kill me makes me stronger" is a popular saying because it is generally true. By overcoming your challenges, you become a stronger, better, more evolved person.

These challenges may come in any number of forms. It could be an illness which weakens them, requiring them to find new stores of inner strength to tap into. It could be a financial problem, which challenges them to maintain their spiritual connection in the face of mundane concerns. Or an irritating relative that challenges them to look within themselves to identify which of their own negative traits that person is reflecting back to them, which will then give them the opportunity to fix it within themselves.

In fact, it is by a life of overcoming the challenges placed before them with grace and dignity that they became "good people" in the first place.

- *Why do people die when they are still needed?*

Death is a unique phenomenon in that it hurts the "witnesses" more than the "victim". When a person dies, their soul separates from their body and the body physically stops functioning. At the point of death (or very soon thereafter) the soul's blinders are lifted and they again have the full awareness of their true existence and the knowledge of the Spiritual Contract that they have just (hopefully) completed successfully.

However, those around them are left in their mortal bodies, suddenly without the familiar and loved presence of their living loved one around them. This loss, no matter how expected, leaves a void in their world where that person previously filled.

In death, you are not actually mourning the person dying, you are mourning your own loss of that person and the void in your life caused by their departure. The person who has died is just fine now. Better than when they were alive, in fact.

It is you who are suffering. Not the deceased.

The more dependent you were on the deceased, the more the you will suffer the loss, because of the larger space in the your life that person occupied.

It is important to remember this fact: that the suffering and mourning of death is caused by you missing them, not by them actually being gone. As a result, you have it within your power to overcome the grief by changing yourself and replacing the space left in your life by their departure with something new and positive.

In doing this, you are not disrespecting their memory. You have an obligation to them to let them go and free them to continue their soul's journey without feeling you constantly trying to pull them back to you. You have an obligation to yourself to continue to grow and evolve without them.

Remember the discussion about Spiritual Contracts: They decided that they were going to die at that point in time, and in that way for a reason. That reason they chose it may have been their own, but it is most likely also for your benefit as well. People come into our lives to teach us lessons, and then they leave our lives so we can apply those lessons and show that we have learned them.

The only way to disrespect the dead is to not live the lessons that we learned from being involved in their lives.

If you want to honor those who have passed, the way to do it is to look back and discover those lessons you have learned from them and consciously apply them to your life and continue to grow and evolve through their teachings to you.

If you want to heal your sense of loss, find something positive to fill the void in your life that their departure left.

It is what they would want you to do.

- *Why is there suffering in the world?*

Because change is uncomfortable. It involves the loss of some things, the need to incorporate new things, the requirement to figure out how to integrate the new combination into your life. It often involves uncertainty, fear, loss, gain, confusion and pretty much every other emotion tossed into the mix as well. And that is much less comfortable than maintaining the status-quo and keeping everything just as it was. In other words, it's uncomfortable.

To evolve is to change.

Therefore, to evolve, we will be uncomfortable as part of the process.

Uncomfortable does not mean "bad". However people often respond instinctively to any change as being a bad thing, due to the uncomfortableness that comes with it. To get through change smoothly, try to get past "uncomfortable" and rearrange your life into a new setup that will provide you with a comfortable setting once again.

One of the tenets of Buddhism is "Life is suffering". A common interpretation is that this is a condemnation of Life, and that only by removing ourselves from life as much as possible can we be relieved of suffering.

My personal interpretation of it is that it is simply an observation. If there is suffering in your life, it means things are changing. If things are changing, it means you are being presented with an opportunity to evolve, to learn a new lesson, to complete another lesson your asked for in your Spiritual Contract.

You are here to learn.

Now go do it.

Closing Thoughts

I wrote this with a few goals:

To provide a framework to help illustrate that life's difficulties can be viewed in a positive light

To explain how we could have consciously chosen the life we live, and why we may have chosen it

To tie a number of different popular concepts together and show how they are inter-related and can support each other

To help people coping with a difficult time in their lives to see how there can be a higher purpose to what they are going through and to help them continue to keep pushing on through their challenges. If you do the hard work and learn the tough lessons you benefit from it.

Hopefully I have achieved at least some of these goals. If you have any questions about anything here, please feel free to contact me and I will be happy to try to explain my thoughts a little more clearly.

Blessed Be,

- Brian Gallagher