

## **Strength From Adversity**

Nietzsche told us "That which doesn't kill us makes us stronger", but is this really true?

We see and hear many stories of people who have triumphed over adversity and gone on to do great things with their lives. But if we asked a sample of people who have suffered loss, hardship or serious illness we would likely find that in many cases they haven't ended up feeling stronger as a result of their ordeal. The endemic use of anti-depressants worldwide also attests to a lack of automatic gain in strength from facing adversity. So if gaining strength from adversity isn't a given then how does it happen?

In order to gain strength from adversity we need a catalyst, and the catalyst comes from how we think about the situation. Every situation has wisdom to impart to us, but only if we are prepared to recognise it. What we say to ourselves and the questions we ask ourselves will be the difference between being defeated and building inner strength. Put another way, our inner strength won't simply come from the adversity itself, but rather from the wisdom that the experience of adversity can impart to us.

We need to resist the urge to say to ourselves 'because of this, I am now that': it is never that clear cut. Say for instance you lose your job, it would be easy to start having negative thoughts about yourself such as that you are useless, unemployable or destined for mediocrity, but by believing in your evolution and purpose for your brief time on earth you can put your focus onto what this means for you in terms of growth and advancement and your entire world can change. Indeed there are countless stories of people losing their jobs and when they look back they realise it was actually the best thing that could have happened to them because it forced them to find a better way forward. In other words they drew strength and inner wisdom from the situation and used it to grow. If they had instead persisted in reinforcing the negative to themselves then there is every possibility that negative would have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The difference is in how they thought and what meaning they attached to the event.

Can this be done in every situation? What about the loss of a limb, or the death of a loved one? The time between the event and when you are prepared to ask yourself for the wisdom may vary, but yes, you can gain inner strength from any situation. The death of a loved one in time can allow you to help others who are facing loss or have just lost someone by sharing experiences and providing support, which can have a massive impact on their ability to deal with the event, which in turn gives you a sense of purpose and meaning. There are also countless people that from the loss of a limb have found the determination and focus to achieve things in their lives that they happily admit they would never have achieved if not for that life changing event. In the process of doing so they have also provided inspiration to countless others, again reinforcing a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives.

We won't become stronger through adversity without effort, but if we ask for and look for the wisdom inside of us we are able to attach meaning to the event that we can use in the service of others, and we know that in the service of others we find our own happiness.

Perhaps Nietzsche's quote could be better rephrased as "That which doesn't kill us gives us the opportunity to be stronger".