

Lose it!

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I swear, it is true. The more tightly you hold onto anything – your life included - the more likely you are to lose it. It is like the proverbial bird – If you hold the bird too tightly, you will kill it. If you let it go and it flies back to you, it is yours.

All of it – your property – the things you own – you think the things you own will be yours forever – but the only way to truly *own* property is to understand the temporary nature of property – everything you have, is gift. When you understand property as gift, ownership becomes invaluable, like jewels – Your children, too – if you hold onto *them* too tightly, you will smother them, or drive them away. Children are meant to be released – in little daily bits – from the minute they are born. When you release them, they become free to love you in return .- Your career – the arrogant person displays his ego up-front – colleagues hide from that person. The one with a healthy ego earns the respect of colleagues.

Life is like that – inside out – up is down, and down is up – and the more you hang onto, the more you lose. Moses – he was *born* to save – that is who he was, by nature – He himself was even saved at birth - but he thought he could save others all by himself – One day, he tried to *save* Hebrew slaves by killing an Egyptian soldier. But it wasn't his time, and as a result, he found himself exiled in the wilderness watching flocks. His life seemed to lose all meaning – and it was *then* – exactly then – that God could use him. When his soul was empty. *I was lost*, he might have sung, *but now am found*. *Blind, but now I see*.

Peter, too – he had just declared Jesus to be the Christ, the very statement that was to become the cornerstone of the church's faith – but Peter thought Jesus was to rule on earth, literally in Jerusalem. So he rebuked Jesus because Jesus spoke of suffering. But Peter was wrong – and his preconceived notions of *messiahship* got in the way of destiny. To be of any use to Jesus at all – Peter had to *change* his beliefs – The one who saves his life will lose it, and the one who loses his life will find it.

Self-denial, some religious people aggrandize self-denial – they glorify it – as though self-denial is the very objective of faith. I think here of Mel Gibson and The Passion of Christ – his Christ bled so violently from the crown, that it appeared as though suffering itself was the point of the passion.

Other religions – too – walking on hot coals, or whipping oneself with leather strips. The more pain, the more *sincere*, or God-like.

I have been *crucified with Christ*, Paul wrote, but he did not mean you suffer to suffer – Nor is suffering to suffer what Jesus means. Suffering plays a role in life – but it is not the point of life. God uses suffering – like he did with Moses – But he'd rather not...

Have to use it at all. Suffering is not Plan A. But when you hold on too tightly ... Well, let me put it this way: let go, Lose your life.

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Names are important to the ancient Hebrew tradition – Amos Oz and Fania Oz-Salzberger – a father and daughter team – wrote about the importance of Hebrew naming in their little book, Jews and Words. *They all have names. Ever since God called Adam Adam, and Adam gave names to all the animals and to Eve, the Bible seems to love calling people by their names.* As though God recognizes each person as an individual - but this is no American style of individuality – The Hebrew Mishna - a commentary on Scripture – says this: if you mint coins using one mold, all the coins will be alike. But when God *stamped each person with the mold of Adam, no two of them are alike.* Hence, each person *can safely say, “For my sake the world was created.”* But it doesn’t end there - that would be narcissism. The world was created for you, but you were created for the rest. There is this symbiotic relationship between the individual and the whole – so much so that the individual *who destroys a single soul – to him it is as though he destroys the whole world.*

You see – you are named, completely unique – but in your DNA, you carry a replication of the whole. And when Jesus says that you only find your life after losing it – you lose it – not for yourself – but for others.

About ten years ago I performed the wedding of a lovely bride and her husband – and at her rehearsal, this bride wore the pink t-shirt – diamond studded – that declared, *It’s all about me.* Indeed – but the point is: it *isn’t* all about you, and *yet* it is all about you. God backed Moses into a corner of trust – literally forcing him into the wilderness to tend someone else’s flocks, because a very mortal Moses got in the way. Moses needed to die spiritually before he could be of any use to God at all. Jesus likewise backed Peter into a corner - forcing Peter to suspend his very beliefs – the beliefs he held most dear –Because only then was Peter to be of any use to Jesus.

You want to save your life? Then lose it. Not artificially, not blood for blood’s sake, but by taking yourself to a deeper spiritual and emotional plain – When I talk *about St. Stephen’s on the Gro*, I don’t just mean church growth – numbers – I mean your own spiritual growth: your prayer, your meditation, your reading of Scripture and meaningful books, your walking an intentional life alongside others who have chosen to do the same.

You are the hope of the world – let’s live that way.