

Crisis: Its Causes and Effects

From Ignorance to Freedom

by Alan Harris

**Pain kindly wakes up stupidity
Lest it slumber through eternity.**

WHAT CAUSES A CRISIS? Such a question may at first seem unanswerable because there are so many different kinds of unpleasant situations into which we humans can get ourselves. In one word, however, the real culprit is probably ignorance.

Ignorance, as used here, does not imply a lack of formal education, since one frequently sees highly educated persons getting into serious personal crises. Real ignorance is a lack of understanding of the law of cause and effect in our own lives. Many of us seem to think that we can do whatever feels good--acquire wealth, achieve status, pursue romantic conquests, eat heartily, and so forth--often at the expense of others, without ever having to concern ourselves with the consequences of such living. We foolishly ignore the karmic wisdom expressed in those popular phrases: "What goes around comes around." and "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap."

Pain, unpleasant as it may be, is our stern benefactor. It teaches us vital lessons as to the conduct of our lives. Feeling pain means that something just isn't working and that it's time to change ourselves or get help through another's experience. Getting help is a wise first step toward overcoming ignorance. When we hurt and really need the help, we listen attentively with mind and heart. We begin to learn those lessons which will prevent us from getting into similar predicaments later on. Some of us have to suffer consequential pain over and over before we are finally ready to seek out its causes. But eventually we say "Enough!" and get to work.

What if the crisis is not our fault, we might ask. Frequently a crisis victim who thinks himself to be blameless will lash out at society, chance, God, fate, the system, his family, or whatever other abstraction it is most convenient to blame. But the threads of cause and effect are many and multicolored. Our puny minds can hardly know for sure how or when an effect will blossom from a previous cause, nor what combinations of circumstances are being dealt to us by our own past choices.

We are the masters of our future because we are free beings, but we are equally the slaves of our past and must pay folly's price.

Helpers in many different roles are available to give us the timely aid we need when in crisis. There are friends, psychiatrists, pastors, counselors, teachers, crisis line operators, doctors, nurses, social workers, and numerous other sources of reeducation when we are up against a wall. If we will only ask them, they can help us overcome that ignorance which has, at least in part, caused us our present agony.

Situations are many and varied, but it is safe to say that a situation never becomes a crisis until it involves pain. Pain spurs us on to *ask*, and exactly at that point is where solid and beneficial learning can begin. Whatever our diplomas and degrees, this is the only real learning. It is this learning that sets us free. Ignorance, mistakes, pain, learning, freedom--so goes the eternal cycle of human evolution.

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