

“Leo Buscaglia.... On bring Human”

Interviewed by Kathryn Lesoine

“Sometimes called the "Love Evangelist," Leo Buscaglia teaches that the alternatives to loving relationships are loneliness, isolation, and loss of self-esteem. The wisdom he shares is that we can choose which reality we want to create for ourselves.”

Meditation Magazine: I am really pleased to be speaking with you today. You have meant a great drat to me personally by helping me understand myself and others.

Leo Buscaglia: Oh, thank you. I'm very pleased to be speaking with you. It always works both ways, you know.

MM: Do you have a specific spiritual practice that you are drawn to?

LB: I used to do a lot of yoga - for years and years while I was in Asia and in the States. It was good for me, and I still continue some. But I found out that for me the most value comes from what I call the clearing of my own mind in the form, of course, of meditation. Getting very centered and clearing my mind, painting my mind white so that there's nothing there...and having moments throughout my day when I can truly dis-appear, so to speak. But maybe it's the opposite. Maybe those moments are when I truly appear. But I don't have a definite name for it. It could be called meditation, but it is not a formal school of meditation. This is something I've developed over the years and it's a wonderful source of replenishing, even though nothing is going on. I guess in Zen it is called 'no mind' and it is just an emptying of the mind so that maybe you are in another level and I think there are a lot of people that would define that as meditation.

MM: *If I were to try your process, would I literally visualize painting my mind white?*

LB: I started that way. The only thing I would allow my mind to deal with would be literally painting the interior of my mind(1 visualized it as a chamber) white - the whitest of white until everything was white on white and nothing stood out any more than anything else and the room became vast and wonderfully big and empty. That was a beautiful way. After having visualized the actual process of doing it, it has now become possible for me to stop, if things become tense, and to simply step into that room without having to go into the whole visualization process.

MM: *Can you take problems into that room to understand them better?*

LB: I use more of a rational mind approach to problem-solving. I reserve the white space as very private place, leaving everything outside.

MM: *I would like to ask your views regarding the concept of soul mates.*

LB: Well, the first thing that occurs to me is that there are many such people. I really firmly believe that if we were to get beyond the facades, beyond the resistances, beyond the fear, and beyond the garbage, we'd have that connection with everybody. I think everybody has the possibility of being a soul mate. And I think that sometimes we get trapped into the belief that there is only the one right person, or the six right people or - even worse - the 10 people who agree with me...you know, that kind of thing. Many, many years ago I sold everything, I took off son of a like a vagabond around the world. My purpose for doing that was to touch others' souls and to find out whether or not they were like mine. Because about two-thirds of the world is sorely lacking our education, and we sort of feel that we have all the answers in our Western world. But I travelled all, through Asia and returned home two and a half years later with one big piece of knowledge that I gained, which is that we are all connected. We are all connected by a very strong, spiritual tie that goes beyond costumes and beyond cultural mores and folkways. That spiritual tie reaches into a space that is available to all of us if we are not resistive. I found that in isolated areas in Asia where people have not yet become "sophisticated," it's very easy to reach inside and find that soul with which we can so easily communicate. But I think our sophistication has laid upon us too many layers of protective covering, therefore it's hard for Westerners to find a true soul mate.

MM: *Why do we hurt each other? Is it because of that resistance you were talking about?*

LB: It's very hard to determine why a person would hurt another person. I think fear has a lot to do with it and ignorance of the simple needs of our own and others are at the core of it. I remember one of the most beautiful things ... I met the Dali Lama and he said, "The purpose of life is to help others: He sort of smiled, 'And if you can't help them, would, you at least not hurt them?'

If that could be the basic philosophy of life for everyone, imagine what a superb, wonderful world this could be! The sad part is that so many of us more often hurt the people we purport to love. We're nicer with strangers, friends and acquaintances than we are with people with whom we are in a very deep and meaningful relationship. We have a greater disregard for their feelings and we're more likely to shout at them and to be rude to them and make demands of them and to insist that they become what we want them to become. That is a very frightening thought. So I would say, when you ask why do we mistreat each other, the essential thing is we have never thought it through very carefully. Because very intelligent people are often involved in these things, and I think if they could sit back and study their own behavior, they would realize how ludicrous it all is. We need to be tender with each other. The things these other people in our lives need are the same things we need. We're only likely to get it if we give it.

Certainly knowledge and empathy would be two of the key words involved in the process.

MM: *Leo, what would you say to a friend of mine - this never happens to me - but what would be your response to my friend saying he can't control his anger?*

LB: Yes, it's always they and them. Well, first of all, I would be very kind. I would say, "You will only control your anger when you decide you want to."

I think all behavior is learned, therefore all behavior is controllable. There are many ways to do something you want to do. It's like you say, "I can't bake a cake." Well, if you decide you want to bake a cake and you have average or better intelligence, all you have to do is get a cookbook and go at it. The thing is that you're not likely to make a prizewinner the first time. You might even fail. But all failures are learning experiences. So, if your friend truly wants to control his anger, all he has to do is decide that this is what he wants and dedicate himself to the process. When he feels his anger welling up, he must make an effort to walk away or find a way of directing it towards the correct object. If he's angry at someone, he should let it out in direct proportion to the merit of the deed and not store it up and then kill somebody. There are ways of directing anger positively, but only when one is dedicated to the process of wanting to do so. To say that you can't do something is a total defeat. There is no such thing as you can't.

MM: *If I create anger in my environment, a person angry at me, would you say that is my anger or something that is happening to me because of someone else?*

LB: Nobody can inflict upon us what we reject. In a way, we want to take on their anger and meet anger with anger. It's a very easy thing to do. It's much easier, in fact, than to accept their anger as theirs. We cannot, unless we want to, take on another person's problems. They have to deal with them. So, if we're finding ourselves behaving in a negative way, then we have taken on anger volitionally. No one else can force us to be angry or to be responsible for his or her anger. One of the most dramatic illustrations of that point are people who were forced into what is probably in our lifetime one of the most dreaded conditions, the concentration camps, in which any form of humanity was removed and they lived in constant fear. There were certain people that rose above it because they said I will not let you make me what you are. They were able to survive even the most brutal of atmospheres. So, it's a cop-out to say that he or she makes me angry - or this or that. You make yourself this or that.

MM: *Are you saying that we choose to be a victim if we are one?*

LB: I think definitely we choose to be victims. It sounds like such a glib remark. It's a hard thing to come to terms with. But it's definitely true. I'm an extremely happy man - almost to the point that people think I'm crazy. That's all right with me, but I'm not exactly insane. I realize there is evil in the world, that there are deceitful people, things to be feared. I also know that I have a

choice. I can make the choice not to let these things become the prime thing in my vision. So I'm going to go out and look for the good things. I'm going to find them because we find exactly what we're looking for. We create our own world and then we have to live in it.

MM: *Would you say we create our own reality?*

LB: Oh, definitely, but I have never known what "reality" is. I teach a university course called Sensation and Perception. One of the things I have my students do is work with understanding that everyone has a separate reality. That is one of the most important things to understand. It can be people's downfall. Because if you say, "I want you to see what I see," you're going to be lost. But the concept of separate realities can also be one of our most valuable tools. It means that we each have a reality to share. If we're willing to keep our realities flexible, we can input a new, fresher, more wonderful reality than we have right now. Reality is constantly in a state of change - that's the only reality.

MM: *How would you define life, being alive?*

LB: The one word that pops immediately into mind is to be free and to be aware. I think these are two words that have come to mean a great deal to me over the years of my life. By free I mean free of cages that we put ourselves in, free to allow ourselves to change, to perceive differently and so on. Aware-ness is to become keenly aware of things and not to accept them at face value, but to look beyond the face value into those aspects that people call unreal and per-haps even discourage you from seeking. I like to feel that I am open, that I'm like a great sponge, that I am like a child constantly railing the world - because I am blind to most of the world. In order to be able to see again, I must be open. The minute I close the door or window a part of what is there will not come to me and it will be, of course, my loss.

MM: *Do you ever have a problem loving yourself? Do you ever have a time or moment when you're not feeling good about who you are?*

LB: I don't have a problem loving myself. Sometimes there are moments in which I am disappointed in me. But I don't stop loving me. If I fall into an old pattern, if I find I am going into a wrong direction, if I find I have closed out someone else's reality or inadvertently hurt someone or done something that could have been done better - I feel moments of disappointment. But I also have learned one of the great, great arts: how not only to forgive others, but to forgive myself. I study those moments of disappointment and try to make them better, so they won't occur next time. In terms of stopping loving myself, it's too late for that now. Loving myself is what makes it possible to love others. Because I recognize my needs and that everybody's needs are very, very similar to my own, I'm able to meet their needs more - and I desire to meet them more.

MM: *I just want to say that what you just shared was a terrific insight for me personally.*

LB: Good, I'm glad. I hope so.

MM: *Why do we create addictions?*

LB: Because they offer us momentary comforts. It's a wise person that realizes that when you feel comfortable, that's a danger. Life should never be comfortable. It should be happy but it should always be in a state of change. Change is never comfortable; it's always bringing about some anxiety, some fear. Every time you open a new door you're very likely to find something behind it that will cause you to make an adjustment. Life is a series of changes and adjustments and new learning. It's nothing to fear, it's something to embrace.

MM: *Can one constantly choose to embrace experience?*

LB: That's what it's all about. Your arms always... your mind always... your heart always... and your soul always have to be open to change - especially to changes that don't quite flow with your river, the ones that cause your river to have rapids, build dams, stop it, and so forth. Those are the changes that will cause you to learn the most about yourself, about others, about life. So, welcome them as readily as you do the steady flow.

MM: *Let's just suppose... if you were elected President of the United States...*

LB: I wouldn't allow it!

MM: *...what would be the first changes you would make?*

LB: I'm not sure I would immediately dedicate myself to making changes. I think that one of the major things I would direct my forces to would be education of the young. That would be the place that we would have the greatest possibility of building a society that would be a wonderful place in which to live. I would dedicate myself to all the sound principals of education: providing a lot of freedom, allowing for a lot of expression, taking away all the stigma that comes from being different, celebrating differences, encouraging creativity – all those wonderful things that are possible in a good educational system.

Also, I would try to do something for the aged. This is a segment of the population that has an enormous amount of knowledge and wealth that is literally being left to go down the tubes. They are one of the richest sources for the future of this country. I would certainly not ignore them, which is being done now. So many of them are abandoned, alone and eating cat food... I would see to it that they were celebrated. They would be part of this wonderful educational system.

MM: *Is there anything else that you would like to say to our readers?*

LB: No. I really regret that you're not here for a great big hug, but you know I send you one.

MM: *I got it and send you one back!*

LEO BUSCAGLIA. for many years a Professor of Education at the University of Southern California. taught a course called "Love." which led to a runaway best-seller of the same name. His words offer personal encouragement to people of all ages to fully develop their human potential and enjoy life through self-actualized. mature love. Leo is the author of several best-sellers. Some of his titles include: "Loving Each Other the Challenge of Human Relationships." "The Fall of Freddie the Leaf." "Living. Loving & Learning." and 'The Disabled and Their Parents: A Counselling Challenge."