

Eight Weeks of Conversation Café

Week Four: Lifestyle Topic- Do All Things Happen for a Reason?

Do you believe that all things happen for a reason? Usually when we hear this phrase we think about bad things that happen. We want to believe that there is a purpose and meaning to life that will help us make sense of suffering. The following excerpt is from the New York Times, October 17, 2014, by Konika Banerjee and Paul Bloom.

Where does this belief (that all things happen for a reason) come from? One theory is that it reflects religious teachings — we think that events have meaning because we believe in a God that plans for us, sends us messages, rewards the good and punishes the bad.

But research from the Yale Mind and Development Lab, where we work, suggests that this can't be the whole story. In one series of studies, recently published in the journal *Cognition*, we asked people to reflect on significant events from their own lives, such as graduations, the births of children, falling in love, the deaths of loved ones and serious illnesses. Unsurprisingly, a majority of religious believers said they thought that these events happened for a reason and that they had been purposefully designed (presumably by God). But many atheists did so as well, and a majority of atheists in a related study also said that they believed in fate — defined as the view that life events happen for a reason and that there is an underlying order to life that determines how events turn out.

Summarize what the author is saying thus far.

What do people from your country think about this idea that all things happen for a reason?

In other studies, scheduled to be published online next week in the journal *Child Development*, we found that even young children show a bias to believe that life events happen for a reason — to “send a sign” or “to teach a lesson.” This belief exists regardless of how much exposure the children have had to religion at home, and even if they've had none at all.

According to the research, even children who grow up in nonreligious homes believe that events happen for a reason. Why do you think children tend to think this way?

This tendency to see meaning in life events seems to reflect a more general aspect of human nature: our powerful drive to reason in psychological terms, to make sense of events and situations by appealing to goals, desires and intentions.

How does thinking all things happen for a reason help people?

How does thinking that all things happen for a reason harm people?

Generally, if people are going through a really tough time of pain and loss, reminding them that all things happen for a reason is not a thought that brings comfort. People in pain need someone to listen and understand their pain rather than tell them that things will be ok.

Megan Devine, an expert in grief support writes, "Some things in life cannot be fixed. They can only be carried." Perhaps it could be said that some of life's tragedy's may never be fully understood. One must learn to live with them.

*What are some of the helpful things people said or did when you were going through a difficult time?
What are some of the things people said that were not helpful and even harmful?*

Have you ever wondered how is it that some people recover and grow from adversity while others remain depressed and devastated?

Growth after trauma can take a number of different forms, including a greater appreciation for life, the identification of new possibilities for one's life, more satisfying interpersonal relationships, a richer spiritual life and a connection to something greater than oneself, and a sense of personal strength. A battle with cancer, for instance, can result in a renewed gratitude for one's family, while a near-death experience could be a catalyst for connecting with a more spiritual side of life. Psychologists have found that experiences of trauma also commonly lead to increased empathy (understanding and compassion) and altruism (looking out for others and not just yourself), and a motivation to act for the benefit of others.

An excerpt from, *Wired to Create* by Scott Barry Kaufman

Put this last paragraph in your own words.

Tell about someone you know who went through a trauma but recovered. What helped them through this time?

What can you learn from them?