

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 96 – Beatriz Friedmann – Conscious Evolution

The Second Mountain

And now a personal word,

The night before my conversation with Beatriz Friedmann, I began reading *The Second Mountain* by David Brooks. The book is an exploration of what it means to live a meaningful life. Brooks believes meaning is found in moral concerns: our regard and commitment to our work, to our friends and families, to our faith and philosophies, and to our communities. The sum of our lives depends on what choices we make and how well we execute those commitments. David Brooks and I have that view in common. Indeed, the *On Life and Meaning* podcast is an assertion about this core belief. We are as good as our devotions and how we embody them.

Brooks noted that people who are fulfilled have often climbed two mountains in life. The first mountain is one of personal ambition. We go to certain schools, pursue certain degrees, accept certain jobs, and marry certain people to show our merit and experience personal happiness. Then one day we look around, and the view is unsatisfying. Something is missing in our lives. Things happen that knock us back: a loss of a career, the death of a loved one, an illness, or the end of a relationship. We enter a valley. We experience a season of suffering. During this time, something is exposed. We become raw. Some of us are broken apart. Others are broken open. If we are fortunate, a transformation occurs. Sometimes suddenly, more often slowly, we find within ourselves what matters most. We elevate our desires. We shift our devotions from what we want from life to what life wants from us. We discover purposes greater than ourselves. And we begin climbing a second mountain.

The second mountain is a surrender to calling. We give ourselves over to a cause. We give ourselves over to love and intimacy. We see what is good outside ourselves and in each other. We choose work carrying the burdens of others in which we experience very difficult days, but we find serenity in our resolve. Brooks noted that the two-mountain shape is not a formula. Our lives have many shapes. Whatever shape it takes, we find grace in the promises we keep.

Beatriz spoke about her journey, from a young girl who suppressed her emotions, who lived independently and analytically, who studied self-improvement, who climbed the first mountain of professional success, planning her way to opportunity. She thought about what she wanted and acted to make it happen. She sought to consciously evolve

and become the most accomplished version of herself. This led her to new lands of possibility.

But then something was missing. Relationships were not all they could be. Feelings that she had long suppressed rose to the surface. Not at once, but over time, she shifted what was important. Then came the season of suffering: the loss of her career, the death of her father, her children moving away. Beatriz broke open. In the rawness of her emotions, she explored what was true about herself. And she gave herself over to new commitments, to counseling children in school, to helping them calm their minds and access their hearts, to serving them through acts of care and healing herself in the process.

There is something else at work with Beatriz. It is something I know well as I have lived my own version of it. It is a strange combination of analytical thinking and Brazilian sentimentality. She has lived the life of a corporate manager: stating objectives, considering contingencies, accomplishing tasks, and realizing outcomes. It is a world of organization and spreadsheets and conference calls. It is a world of efficiency and calculation. Yet Brazil is a nation of friends and family, of warmth and hospitality, of informality and affection. Brazilians are emotional people. They touch, they kiss, and they embrace. They are passionate and expressive. They are filled with memory for what was and yearning for what might be.

This mixture of professional skills and emotional impulse requires discipline to balance. It can spill at any time and often does. I sense Beatriz learned the benefits of control.

Beatriz is preparing for more mountains to climb. She is a planner and lifelong learner. She is an adventurer who takes measured risk. And she sees life as the precious thing it is.

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