

Resentment.....The Pain that Keeps on Giving

- “Living with resentment is like taking poison and hoping the other guy will get sick.”
- “Clinging to resentments poisons your mind, body, and soul.”

Resentment refers to the mental process of repetitively replaying a feeling and the events leading up to it that anger us. We don't replay a cool litany of "facts" in resentment; we re-experience and relive them in ways that affect us emotionally, physiologically, and spiritually in very destructive ways. The inability to overcome resentment constitutes the most devastating impediment to repairing a disintegrating intimate connection, family rift, or severed friendship.

Although resentments may be provoked by recent, specific angry conflicts between two people, they usually encapsulate an enmity that goes much further back.

Example #1: Your parent, child, sibling, or partner may accuse you of a recent snub or slight, but the venom is more than likely fueled by years of other imagined or actual episodes of disrespect or disregard. For example, your spouse may become enraged by a broken promise or breach of attentiveness. Still, if they can't let go of it, it's probably ignited by a long history of neglect, exasperation, and frustration.

Example #2: Your parent or sibling may accuse you of forgetting an important event like their birthday, but again, the most recent accusation is just the trigger for provoking these feelings. The strong reaction of resentment rarely appears warranted by what sets it off. It's always the product of a long history of backed-up unhappiness.

Question: What causes the unhappiness that underlies resentment?

- What we feel people did to us that was unnecessarily mean, hurtful, and thoughtless.
- What people did not do for us that we feel they should have done.
- When we feel the people in our lives have not done enough for us.

Resentments embody an essential choice to refuse to forgive, an unwillingness to let bygones be bygones and bury the hatchet. We review and rehash our painful past, even as we profess to want to let go of it. We do so because we believe the illusion that by belaboring our resentment, we will somehow achieve the justice we think we are due. We cling to a futile need to be "right," which

overrides the capacity to heal and be at peace with ourselves.

We hang on to perceived offences because we don't know any other way of dealing with painful feelings of hurt, rejection, and abandonment. We need to learn to let go of resentment because living with it can only bring us chronic punishment and pain and prevent us from building up other relationships based on love, nurture, and support.

Letting go of resentment is not a gift to the person you resent. It is, instead, a gift to yourself. Clinging to your angry and hurt feelings about someone you once felt close to will only hinder your capacity to move on in your life and learn to deal with the wounds. Letting go of your resentments, whether it leads to healing the rift, wholeness, and peace within yourself, is thus integral to not letting your past interfere with your present. Some time ago, I read something about resentment, which appears to have been written anonymously. It's a very worthwhile and valuable reading.

“The moment you start to resent a person, you become his [prisoner]. He controls your dreams, absorbs your digestion, robs you of your peace of mind and goodwill, and takes away the pleasure of your work. He ruins your religion and nullifies your prayers. You cannot take a vacation without his going along. He destroys your freedom of mind and hounds you wherever you go. There is no way to escape the person you resent. He is with you when you are awake. He invades your privacy when you sleep. He is close beside you when you drive your car and when you are on the job. You can never have efficiency or happiness. He influences even the tone of your voice. He requires you to take medicine for indigestion, headaches, and loss of energy. He even steals your last moment of consciousness before you go to sleep. So-if you want to be a [prisoner]-harbor your resentments!”

Poisoned Mind, Poisoned Body

Let's take a look again at that quote: "Living with resentment is like taking poison and expecting the other guy to get sick." This makes vivid one of the most crippling aspects of resentment - one you may be experiencing right now. Suppose you're thinking about ways to get even and prove to another person that you're right and they're wrong. In that case, you need to remember that the person who is the focus of your animosity may be feeling just fine, enjoying life, and perhaps not at all troubled by any of the interactions renting space in your brain. Ultimately, resentment hurts you far more than the person you hold a grudge toward.

Fortunately, there are ways to get out of resentment's crippling grip. There are alternative, more life affirming, and healthy responses that will help you achieve freedom from obsessing about past injustices. There are choices that you may need to realize are available to you. How can you learn to

get out from under these toxic feelings? Take the following suggestions to heart, and you'll be on your way.

Ten Steps to Letting Go of Resentment

1. Approach resentment as the addictive state of mind it is.
2. Realize that you are using resentment to replicate old dramas and acknowledge that you cannot change the past.
3. Examine how your resentment may come from mentally confusing people in your present life with people in your past.
4. Acknowledge that you cannot control those who have rejected you.
5. Recognize that your resentment gives you only illusions of strength. Instead, highlight and validate your real strength and power.
6. Learn to identify signals that provoke resentment. Apply the acronym HALT, widely used in 12 Step Programs: Hungry, Angry, Lonely, and Tired.
7. Practice cognitive behavioral techniques to stop indulging in resentment. Put a thought between your feelings of resentment and indulging in ruminating about them.
8. Acknowledge your part in allowing the abuse to occur, forgive yourself for that, and decide not to let it happen again.
9. Declare an amnesty with the person you resent and with yourself.
10. Forgive when you can, and practice willful and deliberate forgetfulness when you cannot, keeping in mind that these acts are gifts to yourself rather than capitulation to the people you resent.