

The Resentment Fighter

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Resentment was described by Father Martin, when he came to Lemoyne College, as "anger that is being re--sensed." That is sensed again. Frederick Nietzsche said, "Nothing on earth consumes a man more completely than the passion of resentment."

To get a flavor of the passion we look at the tale of the monkeys as related to us by Rev. Greg G. "The story is told of an African people who regarded monkey meat as a delicacy especially suited for their festival meals. The monkeys, however, were difficult to capture. They rarely strayed from the safety of the trees...

"Nevertheless, the villagers found a way to get their hands on the monkeys... With [river] clay they fashioned crude bottles that were round on the bottom and curved up into long narrow necks. ...The villagers filled the bottom of these bottles with peanuts and set them out on the floor of the jungle. Then the villagers went home to bed."

"During the night, the monkeys smelled the peanuts, sensed that everything was safe, and came swinging down from the trees to investigate. One by one the monkeys reached down into the bottles and grabbed a fistful of peanuts. When a monkey tried to retrieve its prize, however, it found it could not pull its fist out of the bottle. Though it strained with all its might, it could not pull the peanuts from the bottle."

"The next morning, the people arose and walked out to the clearing in the jungle, where they found the monkeys still trying to jerk their treasure from the bottles. Casually, the villagers scooped up the monkeys, broke the bottles, and carried the animals home to provide stew meat for their festival."

Ultimately the monkeys lost their freedom because they were not willing to let go. They refused to unclench their fists. So it is with our resentments. If we want to be set free from our resentments, most likely we will need to let go of something.

I, as a psychiatrist, have seen so many bitter people who have lived years of twisted pain, not willing to let go of the fact that someone hurt them. I determined that there was no way I was going to live that kind of life no matter what kind of offense was done to me.

What I am saying here is when I start realizing that resentment is a real pain in the chest-- that it is causing me more discomfort than anyone else, then I am prepared to start letting it go. Admittedly then I get into a struggle of ---OK, if I let the resentment go, will I be letting the other person off the hook?-----HECK, I hurt! Getting rid of my pain is more important than being concerned about the other person's role in the situation.

Some people will carry resentment as a way to vindicate an angry bitter life focused on the past. By putting someone else in a despised spot they put themselves on a pedestal. They hesitate to give up the painful, consuming burden of resentment because they will have to lose the illusionary boost to their self-esteem.

There are many good reasons to keep resentment away from our lives. An important one would be to keep our bitter bile from lashing out on our children. This is too big a price for that boost of self-esteem.

Rev. Greg G. in *Getting Rid of Resentments* says, "(Many people) think that hanging on to the pain of the past will keep us safe from being hurt in the future." However, Mary McCloud Bethune explains, "Forgiving is not forgetting, it is letting go of hurt."

When a person asks, "How do I possibly jump from this bitterness and resentment to something of gratitude?", I reply, "when I realized that my bitterness hurt me more than anyone else, I began to search for another way to view my situation...I refused to carry the burden of bitterness any further.

"The best antidote for resentment is the continual practice of gratitude," says ODAT, June 2. ODAT is short for One Day at A Time-an Al-Anon book. ODAT, May 5 further explains, "I allow my mind to keep filled with grievances, and the more I think of them the bigger they loom...I control these thinking times. If I meditate on what is good in my life, it will increase day by day and crowd out the self pity and resentment over what I lack and what is hurting me."

Dr. M. Scott Peck wrote on gratitude in his book *In Search of Stones*. He states, "Grace, however, is unearned. It is free. It is gratis. So we have three words - grace, gratis, and gratitude. They flow into each other. If you receive grace you will naturally feel grateful...those who perceive grace in the world are more likely to be grateful than those who don't. And grateful people are more likely to make others happy. Feeling given to by the world, they feel more predisposed to give back to the world."

When I begin to slide into resentment, I always start with this short gratitude list, things I have gotten absolutely free. I am almost six feet tall. I am a male. I am healthy. I am an American. I live in a country where peace is common. I am very grateful for these gifts. We can make a gratitude list like this in preparation for a sudden onset of resentment.

In developing a gratitude list the first thing to do is to go one small step at a time. ODAT, September 9th urges, "As a beginning I apply a liberal amount of gratitude for even the littlest advantage and pleasure when I build on this precious foundation of present tangible good, things will continue to change for the better." Or as Peggy Flanders said in her sermon "The Attitude of Gratitude," (FUUSS 11/23/2000) "Mindfulness toward simple things: food that nourishes you, eyes that open, friends and family who see and love us for who we really are--might be 'down to earth' ways to express gratitude." These simple things, done on a daily basis are ways to building gratitude.

We need to set aside times to be grateful and practice cultivating a sense of awe. Our elders, our forefathers had certain rituals of giving thanks at every mealtime and on days such as Thanksgiving. Over time some of these rituals became very stale. In the face of troublesome times they ceased to remind us of the free gifts of grace that we were receiving.

What we need to develop in our own lives is an ongoing mindfulness. Sheila Schuh has been modeling the development of new rituals, UU rituals to enrich our lives today. We can build on these ideas. As we find ways to let the gratitude flow out of our heart, we find wondrous things. The resentment diminishes. We feel full. We feel like we want to give to others, not that we want to hurt them. We find ourselves, as the research demonstrates, healthier and happier.

Next we need to see gratitude in the midst of tragedy, darkness and diversity. David Blanchard gave us an example of this last November in his sermon on the harvest of the haggard year, "Gratitude as an Attitude." He was specifically relating to the first Thanksgiving where half of the people died and there was a drought. He felt that the people survived because they were thankful. He stated that "doubt and confusion are necessary doors toward insight and (that) pain is a necessary function of healing."

Helen Keller said, "Everything has its wonders even darkness and silence, and I learn whatever state I may be in, therein to be content". ODAT, January 6th says, "When things look blackest it is within my power to brighten them with the light of understanding and gratitude. I realize how much depends on my point of view, my own wrong habits of thinking and acting must be corrected. Only I can do that." Martha Washington summarized in her quiet way, "The greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our disposition and not on our circumstance."

The Al-Anon book *Courage to Change* states, "when I appreciate what I have instead of dwelling on what I lack, I feel good about my life. This allows me to be happy for another person's abundance."

M. Scott Peck talked about learning to see gratitude in the great diversity present in people. He was shocked and offended when his first manuscript was returned with about 10,000 different corrections. He was able later to see the copy editor's attention to fine detail, a quality that Peck did not have, as a gift of love. This reminds me of the different gifts that my mother and father had. My father had the gift of creativity where he could see the big picture. He could imagine great creative things, but he needed someone like my mother to take care of the very small details. Dad always had an assistant manager who loved detail work. They meshed in a way, each having their own separate gifts in what M. Scott Peck called healthy interdependency.

Another resentment fighting technique is to not go there in the first place. As Rev. Greg G. says, "Do not respond to the ridiculous," and "let it be." So often we take someone's caustic or angry words seriously, giving away our serenity - thinking about the circumstance again and again. As Shakespeare says in *Othello*, "Thou hath not half the

power to do me harm as I have to be hurt." Just let it be - be an angry word - nothing more.

Expectation has been called the premeditated resentment. I need to be careful not to try to control the rest of the world - not have them do as I think they should. For example, when I make a plan that my brother will be prompt as I am prompt, I am setting myself up to resent. Some of this resentment may come from what others are doing on an ongoing basis. Again, I borrow on the wisdom of ODAT, October 9th, which says, "If I am truly grateful I will keep my hands off..." The rest is from Thessalonians, "Study to be quiet and to do your own business and confuse not the business of others with your own."

Resentment is the re--sensing of anger. It is poison to our lives. We re--sense to make ourselves look better than others, and to not be hurt in the same way again. When we realize the cost of resentment, we can turn to the resentment fighter - Gratitude.

We can prepare a gratitude list and one small step at a time, on a daily basis, we can use fresh rituals to remind us of what gifts we get free. With vision we can even see gifts that are hidden in the midst of darkness and tragedy.

Of course, it is always best not to trod upon the painful path of resentment in the first place!