

Lesson: Release and Regenerate: Part 1



I frequently hear phrases such as, “You are the happiest person I have ever met, don’t you ever get angry?” and, how can you be so patient, don’t people get on your nerves?” I consider myself a tolerant person and have been able to maintain a fairly positive disposition in many settings. I do become angry and lose tolerance with certain behaviors. I believe the feedback I receive about my positive demeanor is not so much about being in a perpetual state of bliss, but is more likely related to an important skill I have been working on over the years-how to detach from negative and irrational behavior.

I would like to share in this article a few life lessons I have learned from working with thousands of clients over the years in their pursuit of “happiness” as well as my own interpersonal awakenings that have contributed to my ability to detach from various negative interactions. Part 1 of the article will focus on developing the awareness to release negative thought patterns and the second part of this article (to be published shortly) will focus on a model of regeneration to use for a healthier thought process.

Psychotherapy involves the process of identifying personal barriers and strengths and developing a plan for change and growth. In order to implement a plan for change, a “letting go” process needs to be present. Perhaps we need to let go of old habits, or we need to let go of a value system inherited from childhood that has become detrimental or maybe we need to release maladaptive thinking patterns that keep us stagnant. Outside of the world of psychotherapy, releasing negative energy is also connected to increased productivity at work, meaningful interpersonal relationships and improved mental and physical health.

Why is it hard to let go of unhealthy thoughts and patterns? People seek predictability and their own sense of “normal.” If it was easy to change patterns, everyone would be substance free, at a healthy weight and meeting all of his/her personal goals. Our “normal” is built from cultural norms, parental styles, religion, ecological factors and a multitude of other dynamics. These aspects are deeply ingrained in our psyche and do not change simply because we want them to. Letting go requires ongoing self-assessment and change.

In order to maintain a healthy thought process, it is important to be mindful of the origin of our thoughts. If we do not assess our own thought process we are at risk for having “automatic” negative thoughts. The majority of people do not want to perceive the world as a bad, suspicious place. Humans develop coping skills to manage their “normal” and to survive in their environment. Some of the coping skills we learn can be used as strengths throughout the lifespan, yet if we are not mindful of certain patterns, they can harm our quality of life and contribute to diminished mental and physical health.



In order to start the process of releasing negative thought processes, it is important to ask yourself the following questions:

1. When are the negative thoughts happening, is it in the same environment, or with the same people?
2. If you can answer yes to question # 1, what does the environment or person remind you of? Is it this particular person or situation that truly bothers you, or does this trigger remind you of something or someone in the past that has disturbed you?
3. When the negative thoughts happen, am I really nervous about a real threat of something, or is it my perception that something is going to turn out negatively? Basically, is there concrete evidence this is true and do I have proof this will turn out badly?
4. Are the negative thoughts truly my own, or am I mimicking a thought process of someone else, such as parents, religious teachings, celebrities, etc.? Is this really my own inner voice driving these thoughts or am I playing back someone else's thoughts as my own?
5. Are these thoughts serving a purpose for me? Are they enhancing my life in some way, or are these thoughts taking away from my quality of life?

Please take some time to reflect on these questions and answer them in a genuine fashion, without anxiety of whether your answers are “correct or appropriate.” In order to evolve, we have to learn to question our internal wiring without self-judgment. We will revisit your answers in next month's Healthy Happenings and provide a helpful model for re-generating your thoughts and behavior.