

Articles on Relationships

By

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#1 Not my problem!

This simple approach has relieved the stress of many with whom I shared it. Let me illustrate the concept and its practice, with a typical a dialogue I had with one of my client Christine. My name is 'C S' in the following dialogue.

Christine: My boss routinely uses insulting language in the office, even in presence of others. I feel very angry and clench my jaws and grind my teeth. I suffer from chronic neck pain. I suffer from insomnia thinking about all this at night.

C S: Why does he behave like that? Do you think you deserve it?

Christine: No! I didn't do anything to deserve such a treatment for him. He routinely behaves like that with all of the staff in the office.

C S: Why does he behave abusively with all the staff, most of the time?

Christine: He is nuts! He is a pervert!

C S: Why don't you quit his office and find another job?

Christine: It is not possible to find another job in this economy. I have to stick to this job.

C S: OK. You said it is in his nature to behave abusively with all the staff. You and your coworkers are sure none of you did anything to trigger his repeated abusive behavior. In other words, you are saying that “HE” HAS A PROBLEM, NOT ANY OF YOU! Listen carefully.

If “HE” has the problem, he should be the one under stress! When you don’t have any problem, WHY ARE “YOU” UNDER STRESS? I don’t get it!

Whenever he talks like that, tell yourself silently “This guy has a big problem! He is nuts! That is why he is talking like this. I AM OK.”

Christine, one of my clients sincerely followed this thought process and felt so good she said in her testimonial “Due to these practices, my body balance has changed and my mind has become so relaxed that nothing and no one stresses me.”.

Another client Eva (Not her real name) was under great distress due to the verbally abusive behavior of her boss. After she absorbed this message and a few others, she totally changed her ex-abusive boss!

#2 The ‘person walking by’ laughed at me

Imagine this scenario.

You are the person (A) standing on the sidewalk, waiting for your friend. Another ‘person walking by’ (walker) laughs at you and quietly goes ahead. You are surprised. You look at your dress and find it is OK. You pull out a small hand mirror from your hand bag and look at your face. Nothing wrong! You are puzzled, offended and angry at the walker. Why did he laugh at me? There is nothing wrong with me! Thoughts are racing in your mind. But you can do nothing but keep watching the walker moving ahead.

A few yards ahead, there is another person (B) standing on the sidewalk. As the walker goes past (B), he laughs at (B) also. You find absolutely nothing about (B) to laugh at. You are less worried and more curious now. What is going on here?

A few yards ahead, there is another person (C) standing on the sidewalk. The walker looks at (C) and laughs like he laughed at you and (B). You find nothing wrong with (C). What would you think now? You won’t be worried any more, at the behavior of the walker and its impact on your own self has become zero because it is now very clear that he is crazy.

How did you make this great discovery? By making a reality check when the walker laughed at you, B and C, continuing to watch the walker’s behavior when you found it unusual and by not immediately berating yourself when the walker laughed at you.

#3 The blamer is hit with the blame bug

Sometimes a person blames you for no fault of yours, or behaves in an improper manner, hurting your feelings.

Scenario I: In this scenario, you immediately feel bad and search for your alleged fault or wonder how you deserved such a treatment from the blamer. It is possible, you did not do anything wrong, as alleged and wonder why the blamer picked on you. Or if you really did something wrong, you blow it up in your mind. Wait, you can create another scenario.

Scenario II: As soon as you hear the blaming words, visualize yourself dressed as a judge, sitting in the high chair of the judge in the courtroom. In the role of the judge, you are patiently listening to the blamer, making out a case to prosecute your original self. In the role of the impartial judge, you realize you were blaming your original self without demanding supporting proof from the blamer and not giving yourself the benefit of doubt.

When you are convinced as an impartial judge that the blame was totally baseless or blown up, you can look at this phenomena differently. Imagine that the blamer is hit with the blame bug. He develops the symptoms of this disease – shaking with anger, hatred, so on. He is now trying to infect you with his blame bug. If you let him succeed, the blame bug will work inside you, causing similar symptoms. You will get angry and look for someone to yell at. Or you find it easier to become angry at yourself and start bashing yourself. You need not become a victim like this. Try this alternative.

As soon as the blamer yells at you showing his symptoms of anger, hatred etc. realize that he was infected with the 'blame bug'. He is exhibiting the symptoms of the 'blaming disease'. He is trying to pass on that 'bug' to you to see you suffer like him. That is his plan. This sort of self realization works like a vaccine against being infected with the 'blaming disease'. Once you adopt this attitude, you will look at the blamer for what he is – a sick person, struck with the 'blaming bug'. You will feel sorry for the blamer for suffering from that disease. When you develop this healthy attitude, the 'blaming bug' does not enter your mind and affect your behavior. You will remain a healthy and happy person. Isn't this a better response than Scenario – I?

#4 To speak or not to speak? To act or not to act?

Sometimes we are faced with challenging situations, unable to decide anything. We feel stuck. We need a strategy to get unstuck and keep going. The following approach may be helpful.

Protect yourself with the three 'C' s

1. Clear mind: Seek clarity on facts. Make a reality check on the situation, people, their actions and intentions. Keep on working in this sphere, till you feel confident that you are not imagining things but seeing truth. Make sure you are not in confusion or doubt (1). First task is to achieve this mental clarity. Don't speak or take any action even now. Read on for the second 'C'.

2. Clean heart: Check your heart if you have any negative emotions like revenge, hatred, cheating, fear, guilt etc. Clear your negative emotions as they will surely trip you on the way. The comes the third 'C'.

3. Compassionate attitude: Check whether you have a compassionate attitude towards 'yourself' and 'others' who may be affected by your words and actions. If your words and actions are not arising out of compassion to everyone (everyone includes your own self), hold all speech and action. Take time to develop a compassionate attitude (2).

Now speak and act

Once you have put on these triple protections around you - a clear mind, a clean heart and a compassionate attitude, speak and act with confidence and conviction. You can't do wrong to yourself or anyone. You won't have regrets. You can stand before GOD and say boldly "I did the right thing. I am

proud of myself.". If you won't be afraid of facing GOD with conviction, why should you be afraid of any human being?

#5 I hated the garbage and I stopped hating it

How is that? There is a story behind it.

For my morning walk, I chose a dirt path around the boundary wall of the housing colony of our company, to avoid meeting known people, having to talk to them and breaking the walking tempo. Most of the path was peaceful and was a visual feast of green trees, early morning sounds of birds and an occasional 'good morning' with a known person. It was a wonderful break from the concrete, steel and continuous streams of people I was seeing throughout my working hours.

On the first day, at the midpoint of the path, I smelled the faint stench of garbage. As I walked on, the stench intensified and became progressively unbearable. I was distressed that the beautiful and peaceful path I had chosen was marred by this stench. I cursed the garbage and blamed the people who chose this place. I almost ran past the length of path with the stench, feeling relieved when the stench stopped. The next day, having known the spot from where the stench would start, I would anticipate the stench even before it was felt.

Automatically the disgust at the garbage would arise in my mind. Day after day the garbage and its unbearable stench became a prominent part of my morning walk experience. I tried to minimize the duration and impact of the stench by taking a deep breath, holding my breath and walking very fast for that stretch. I would resume breathing after the stench stopped. I started hating the garbage every day and my hatred was accumulating. Even before I reached the starting point of the actual stench, I used to anticipate it and start hating the imaginary garbage and the imaginary stench. Soon the actual stench would join the imaginary stench and actual hatred join the imaginary hatred.

This prolonged (or so I felt) disruption of an otherwise peaceful morning walk was bothering me. After a few days of this very unpleasant experience and going through the drill of holding breath and walking fast, I started reflecting over it. It led to an internal dialogue. Who was the culprit? Who else but the garbage spreading the unbearable stench? "That stinky garbage is spoiling my walk!" Why am I hating the garbage? Because it was giving out the unbearable stench. What do I expect the garbage to do? It should stop giving out the stench. What smell do I expect from the garbage? Why not the opposite of stench? Do I want the garbage to give out a pleasant smell - of lavender, rose or jasmine? Yes, then I will be very happy and may even love it.

The moment the above thought arose, a smile came on my lips realizing the stupidity of my thinking. My attitude towards the garbage changed dramatically. What am I asking from the garbage, to smell like roses or at least not smell at all? Am I crazy? If it does not give out that unique garbage stench, it can not be called garbage. It will of course stop smelling bad when it fully decomposes. Yes, this is what I want from it –stop smelling bad. But, if it decomposes and stops smelling, it will no longer be called garbage. Its name will then be 'Compost'. Then I felt silly for hating the garbage for its stench. My persistent hatred of garbage came to an end. I stopped hating garbage. Garbage is only exhibiting its inherent nature by giving out the stench. It is least bothered about who is getting offended or hating it, let alone my tiny self. It does not even recognize my existence.

After some time, this concept spread into other life situations. I used to dislike some people for their unpleasant behavior. I applied the garbage concept to their behavior. Being human beings with higher

capabilities, they are capable of being nice to some people and nasty to some others. It is their nature to behave badly towards me for which they may have their own reasons or they may be retaliating to my own nasty behavior towards them about which I might have conveniently forgotten. There are two dimensions of suffering here. The first dimension is the direct suffering due to the unpleasantness of their behavior. The second dimension which is more intense and longer lasting is their indifference to my suffering.

What can I do to avoid these two kinds of suffering? When I can not change their behavior to a pleasant one, I can adopt the same attitude that I adopted towards the garbage. First I should accept that it is in their nature to be nasty towards me (like it is in the nature of garbage to smell bad). In other words I should attach the label of 'Stinky Garbage' to them. I should not wish that they change their behavior. I better avert my mind when they give out the stench and minimize it's impact on my senses. Once the episode is over I should take it out my mind just as I forget the smell of garbage after I go past that stretch of the path.

What prevents my forgetting their nasty behavior is the secondary suffering due to their lack of concern for my hurt feelings, even ignoring my existence. It is easy to avoid this suffering as well. Treat this second aspect of their behavior as the second bad smell of a special garbage. Accept that these people have two kinds of bad smell - one is the desire to hurt others' feelings and the second is to be insensitive to their agony or even to enjoy seeing their suffering. You can label them 'Dual Stink Garbage'. Once labeled like this, their behavior can only bother you only when it is occurring, not afterwards. Any kind of prolonged suffering is totally avoided.

#6 Focus on the message or the messenger

We see this situation often. Consider these scenarios.

- A sufi teacher (1) was pointing his crooked index finger, bent due to arthritis, at the moon. He was asking his student to look at the beautiful full moon in the sky. The student was focusing on the crooked index finger. He could not see the moon as he could not detach his attention from the finger. The communication between them was a total failure. Who is responsible? Who is the loser?
- I receive a partially damaged and dirty envelope from the tax department. I feel like throwing it in the trash bin. But then....What if it is a notice of an audit of my tax return? Or it has a check for the tax refund? Should I ignore the dirty condition of the envelope and open it, pull out the letter and then toss the envelope in the trash bin?
- I parked my car crossing the dividing line between the two parking spots, close to the entrance of a famous temple and went inside with my family. The adjacent parking space was wasted, as it was risky for anyone to park in that narrow space. That being a weekend, there were many visitors and the parking was very tight. When I returned after the worship, I found a paper under the wiper of the windshield with the pungent message "Stupid! Don't you know how to park?" I felt very bad. Should I curse the hot blooded person, may be a youngster, for his crude message? Should I regret my negligent parking, depriving another devotee of a convenient parking space? Should I etch this incident in my mind and not repeat the parking negligence any time in future? Should I thank the youngster for teaching me an important lesson that I definitely needed, though in a crude manner? Could I have realized my inappropriate action affecting other people on my own, if I did not get that crude message, from whoever it may be?

(1) Sufism is defined by its adherents as the inner, mystical dimension of Islam. A practitioner of this tradition is generally known as a Sufi.

#7 Seeing a person in a video, not a photo

When a person insults or hurts us, a single negative image of that person gets stuck in our mind. All other images of that person, good and bad, before and after that image, remain sort of behind a screen. The result is repeated self hurting, hatred, so on. We find it almost impossible to dislodge that single negative image and the consequent distress, unable to get back to a healthy state of mind. In such situations, we can try the following process.

Choose an undisturbed time of about 30 minutes in a quiet place. Sit comfortably with back properly supported (not stooping) or lie down. Close your eyes. Practice one of the modes of 'focusing on breathing' for about 15 minutes (1). Then, recall the photo of that person and his negative actions (I am using 'he' but this could be 'she' as well). Let us assume he looks 40 years and shouting abuses. Imagine and visualize how that person would have looked and behaved at 35 years. If you don't know how he might have behaved at that age, imagine freely using your common sense. Next, imagine and visualize how that person might have looked and behaved at 30 years. Continue this process of visualizing his looks and actions till his infant stage, just born and lying eyes closed, by the side of his mother, breathing quietly.

Now, compose a video of that person's actions from all the video bits just collected from current 40 years to a just born infant. Store this full life video in your memory. Every time the negative photo or video slice of that person comes into your mind, run the full life video of that person from your memory. Repeat this practice every time you feel negative about that person.

Over a few months of practicing this technique, you will not get stuck with the single negative image of that person. You will see that person playing a role in a long video movie, rather than the single vicious bit of his or her life. No more distress?

If this process makes sense, extend the video into his future life, till the moment of his death. Imagine him growing older, losing his fitness and faculties, becoming helpless and dependent on others, for his daily needs, like how he was, as a just born baby, once upon a time. And finally, imagine him as he would look when he just died, lying motionless without breathing.

Whenever you get stuck with his negative posture or behavior, replay his full life video showing him as the just born infant to just dead lifeless body. Can you be stuck in anger, hatred etc. after running his secret whole life video?

#8 We do not see the prior part of people's lives

Let us start with some imaginary scenarios to bring out an important concept.

A boy 'A' was playing with a ball. He was throwing it to a wall, it was bouncing back to him, he was catching it and throwing it back to the wall. On one occasion, he missed his catch and the ball hit his head. A person 'B' made a video recording of this missed-ball sequence, from the moment the ball left the hand of the boy, till it hit his head.

Then he cut the total sequence into two parts. Part one showed the action from the moment the ball left the boy's hand till it contacted the wall. Part two showed the rest of the moment from the ball leaving the wall, till the ball contacted the boy's head.

He then showed only the part two of the sequence to a person 'C' who immediately commented that something mysterious happened. How can a wall throw a ball to a boy and hit him on his head? Then he was shown part one of the sequence and then part 2. Person 'C' immediately realized that what he saw was something quite natural, the ball was thrown at the wall and it bounced back to hit the boy when he missed it.

Now imagine another scenario. Two persons 'A' and 'B' were walking on a road. Suddenly 'B' hit 'A' for no apparent reason and 'B' hit him back. A third person 'C' made a video recording of this total incident and cut it into two parts.

He then showed part two of the sequence to a person 'D' who immediately commented that 'B' was a very bad person for hitting 'A' for no reason. When 'C' showed the part one of the sequence, 'D' immediately reversed his comment and said that 'B' did the right thing in hitting 'A'. If he did not teach 'A' the lesson, he would have been hitting many others.

In both the above imaginary scenarios, the impressions created and the comments they generated on seeing the only the second (or the reaction) part of the incidents, were false. Immediately on seeing the part one (or the action that caused the reaction) of the incident, the commentators reversed their conclusions. If the onlookers had not seen the first part, they would have persisted in their wrong conclusions.

Alternatively, the onlookers could have asked the videographer "Did anything happen before the incident you are showing us". If they thought of this possibility and taken the time to inquire for possible reasons for the incidents shown to them, they might have found the causes for the part two's of the incidents. Justice would have been done to everybody.

Now, come to real life situations. Whenever we see somebody behaving in an improper or unusual manner, most of us jump to judgments and pass immediate comments. We have no interest, time or patience to probe for the potential first parts. We can think of the above imaginary scenarios and ask ourselves the question "Could there be some cause for this person to behave in this manner? Is he or she acting on own or reacting to something that happened earlier? Let me see the total phenomena - action and reaction, come to a fair judgment and only then pass my comment." We can hold our judgments and take time to get the first parts and the total picture. We will then be wiser and avoid some regrets.

#9 Living Lessons From My Brother's Childhood Death

The tragedy happened fifty 50 years back. I was in my first job, far away from my family. I got a postcard from my father that my brother 'Ramu' aged 10, drowned in the nearby lake. Ramu was a darling of our family, exceptionally good in behavior and studies. I remembered his sewing on the machine and helping mother in domestic chores. I was in a turmoil. One question constantly haunted me. 'Why did God take away such a wonderful brother prematurely at 10? Why? Why? I could not work, eat or sleep like I used to.

Later, we learned that Ramu met a fortune teller whose parrot picked a card forecasting life risk from water. That might have influenced him. Or, he was destined to die at 10 which made him enter the lake without knowing swimming.

Coming back to my agony, after a couple of days, I heard a silent voice asking me ‘Why do you blame God? Did HE promise you that your darling Ramu would live into old age? If He didn’t promise, you can’t blame Him.’. It was true that God did not promise a long life for Ramu. I suddenly stopped blaming God. My turmoil cooled down. After some time, a healing thought arose. Out spiritual texts say that this world is a stage and we are all actors playing different roles for different periods. Every actor goes behind the back screen after playing his or her role. My brother Ramu played his child role for 10 years and went behind. How can I complain? Should I not be happy that he played his assigned role superbly, giving us the pleasure of his presence for 10 long years? I was surprised at my turning around from blaming God for taking away Ramu, to thanking HIM for giving us his presence for 10 years.

I was still suffering. Another thought arose. I was suffering because of my baseless expectation about his life term. Had I accepted the irrefutable truth that his death might happen at any moment, my suffering would be limited to losing the pleasure of his presence that I took for granted. From now on, I should rightly focus on the memories of his sweet behavior over 10 long years.

As these thoughts repeatedly circulated in my mind, I regained my peace of mind. Later, when faced with some disappointments in life, another thought arose. If there is no certainty about the full disc called life, how can there be any certainty about any segment of it, like education, employment, marriage, children etc.? If I could be at peace about my sweet brother Ramu’s death in childhood, I might as well be at peace about the other losses and disappointments of life. Once I accept this uncertainty, I can deal with it.

The uncertainty about every aspect of life need not paralyze me into inaction. The probability of succeeding in achieving my goals is as real as that of failing and no one knows the percentages of the two probabilities. We tend to blow up the probability of failure because of the negative mode in which we were brought up as children. It is foolish to not try with all my mind and heart and miss my potential for some degree of success. Such a healthy attitude would enable me put in my best efforts. Whatever I achieve becomes a gift, small or big, to be accepted gratefully.

My brother Ramu’s death taught me some precious lessons for living: embrace the uncertainties; resist blowing up potential failures; constantly nurture the potential for success by putting in my best efforts and be grateful for whatever life offers.

#10 The courtroom treatment for stressful thoughts

Many of us get a few stressful thoughts that repeatedly pop into the mind. The moment such a thought enters the mind, the associated feelings of anxiety, guilt or panic arise. Result is stress in the mind and tensing of the muscles of the body. Every time such a thought enters the mind, its power seems to get enhanced, like a balloon growing bigger every time you receive it in your hands.

Here is the 'courtroom' treatment to drain the power from such thoughts. It is like pricking a balloon and deflating it, every time it lands in your hand. A few repetitions of this treatment will disable such thoughts permanently.

To illustrate this technique, we will use the real life story of Latha (name changed) a woman in her forties who attended series of my classes. She had the recurring thought that she was responsible for the death of her father who died 12 years back, due to heart failure. He literally in her hands when they were the only two people in the house. When he collapsed, she administered CPR as she knew it and tried to revive him. She promptly called her sister and emergency number #911. But her father died in her hands before the emergency medical team arrived.

Though she did all that she could to save him, the guilt laden thought that she was responsible for his death haunted her for more than 12 years. She was suffering from Fibromyalgia, Insomnia, Obesity and more. She was single, living alone and unable to do any work in her own house. She stopped driving. She was living on disability payments and her family was helping for all the physical tasks like vaccuming. She got addicted to powerful painkillers to suppress her body pains and painful feelings. Here is how we used the 'Courtroom' technique to defuse the destructive thought of guilt.

This courtroom has 4 key persons.

The alleged culprit (AC): This is the silent woman herself, drowned in guilt. Imagine she is at the heart position.

The prosecution lawyer (PL): This is the voice in Latha's mind, who is constantly blaming her, for her father's death. Imagine that the PL is sitting on the left shoulder.

The defense lawyer (DL): This is the normally dormant or sleeping voice in the mind. He needs to be woken up and motivated to defend the (AC), the alleged culprit. Imagine the DL sitting on the right shoulder.

The Judge: This is your own cool, unbiased and fearless mind, whose existence you may not even be aware. Its job is to listen to both the lawyers, examine the evidences presented by them and pass an unbiased fair judgement. Imagine the Judge sitting in your head position.

Latha physically enacted the court room scene in the waiting room of my daughter's office where I was doing the classes. She played the roles of PL, DL and the Judge, one at a time. We set up four chairs in a circle. On one chair we placed a magazine to represent the (AC), alleged culprit, the woman herself. The woman initially sat in the chair labeled PL (Prosecution lawyer) and made the allegation that Latha, pointing to the magazine representing her, failed to save her father's life, though she was present with him when he collapsed. Latha was guilty of her father's death and deserved an appropriate punishment. PL wrote down these statements on a sheet of paper under the sub title "Allegations by the Prosecution Lawyer".

Then Latha moved into the chair labeled DL (defense lawyer), carrying the paper of allegations written by PL in her hand. I told her that in this second chair, she being the DL had to make as many statements as she could, to contradict the PL's allegations. DL should try to prove the allegations of PL wrong or doubtful, citing the facts.

This was a totally new thought process for Latha. Never in the past did she try to defend herself against the allegation. With some probing questions, she could recollect her loving and prompt actions to save her father's life. As Latha started narrating, truly playing the role of the DL, she became quite emotional and vigorously defended herself. She felt some visible relief immediately. She wrote down the counter arguments as DL on another sheet of paper under the title "In defense of the (AC)".

She then moved into the judge's chair, carrying the above two sheets of paper in her hand. Now her job was to consider the statements of both the lawyers and give an unbiased ruling on the allegation. For the first time in the last 12 years after the incident, she genuinely felt that she did not deserve to be blamed for her father's death. She said so in a matter of fact way without any difficulty. The spell of guilt which kept her imprisoned for 12 long years was finally broken. She felt tremendous relief.

I told Latha that whenever the guilt laden thought entered her mind, she should promptly recollect and re-play the above process enacted by her in her mind. After a few days, Latha said that the extreme panic she experienced whenever she even looked at her father's photo gradually diminished. It totally disappeared in a few weeks.

#11 Celebrate small changes In the right direction

The president of an African country was asked by a journalist to describe the achievements of his government. He said "My dear friend, I am not in the happy position of seeing what heights I have reached. I only see from what depths I am coming up!". The personal change process is such that we may not experience any waves of happiness even after many years of practice. The few daring people that attempt this process have to sustain their efforts and draw deep inspiration from the tiny reductions in their daily suffering.

#12 Problems may not vanish but we may be able to ride over them

A spiritual teacher said that the meditative techniques like 'Focusing on breathing' do not eliminate the problems which are a part of life. But they help us manage them without getting distressed. He said "You can't avoid the big waves coming at you. But you can use the meditative techniques as a surfboard and ride over the waves".

#13 Androcles and the Lion

This is a story I read in my childhood. Later in life, it's deep significance hit me.

Androcles was a slave in Greece. Disgusted with the life of a slave, he ran away, knowing very well, the risk of death if he gets caught. As was the practice in the kingdom, a roll call was taken of all the slaves the next morning. Androcles was found missing and immediately a band of soldiers set out searching for him in the forest.

Androcles ran as fast as he could. When he could not run any more due to hunger and exhaustion, he sat on a boulder, resigned to his fate of being caught by the soldiers or be eaten by wild animals. Either way, he knew he would die, it was only a matter of time.

As he was watching with resignation, he saw a Lion approaching him at a distance. He knew he had no chance of running away from it, in his hungry and exhausted condition. He continued watching the approaching Lion. To his surprise, the Lion was not running towards him. It was walking slowly, unlike a normal Lion. When it came near him, he saw that it was walking very slowly because one of its legs was limping. He guessed it must be very hungry, as there is no free food in the forest for injured lions,

unable to hunt. He expected the Lion to jump on him any moment and feed itself. But as he was already resigned to his death, he continued to watch the actions of the Lion with resignation.

The Lion came to his feet and Androcles saw it raising its paw, about to strike him. He closed his eyes anticipating the paw hit. He was surprised when he was not hit. He opened his eyes and found the paw still up in the air, close to his face, as if the Lion was showing the sole of that leg to him.

His fear disappeared and his curiosity was aroused. Keenly observing the sole of the foot, he found it was swollen. He guessed the cause may be a thorn embedded in the sole. He got fully involved in the situation and took the courageous step of taking the paw in his hands, locating the tiny thorn and removing it. He squeezed out all the pus and bandaged it, tearing away part of his shirt. Now he waited for the Lion to attack and kill him. But the Lion quietly walked away into the dense forest, to his utter disbelief.

After some time, the king's soldiers found him, shackled and took him back to the kingdom. As per the prevailing law, his punishment was announced in the kingdom. On the appointed day, the people of the kingdom assembled in the large arena. Androcles was brought in and tied to a pole. A cage was brought into the arena with a lion inside. The cage door was opened and the lion set free. People waited to see the gruesome act of the lion eating Androcles live.

The Lion came racing towards Androcles. As soon as it touched him, it stopped dead in its track and started licking his feet. The people and the king were stunned at the miracle of a hungry Lion sparing its prey and behaving like a pet.

You guessed it right! It was the same lion he helped by taking out its thorn. On knowing about the background, the king set Androcles free. The story ends happily.

The events and the roles played by the characters trigger a series of thoughts ...

Look at what Androcles and the Lion did in the forest.

First, at Androcles.

When he saw the lion was slowly coming towards him, he could have probably run away and saved himself. But he might have been captured by the king's soldiers and met his death anyway. He saw the inevitability of his death either way but had the courage to continue to look at the Lion and its condition. He wished to use his available life in the best possible manner.

He had the keen observation and a cool mind to locate the thorn in its sole, even in that life threatening situation.

He had the good nature of trying to help a suffering animal, in spite of the immediate risk of his own death from the same animal. He did not expect any return favor from the lion.

Now let us look at what the Lion did.

It had the presence of mind to see a potential savior in Androcles, knowing, it will otherwise die of hunger, being unable to hunt for its food. It was probable he had a gun or knife with which he could have killed it. A Lion being the king of the forest, has to swallow great pride, to seek help from a weakling like Androcles. After it got help from him, the Lion had the decency of not killing and feeding on the person who saved its life.

Let us look at some potential insights hidden in this story.

A lion is the most powerful animal in the forest. It can kill even an elephant, several times its size. But, here is the irony of nature. A lion can kill an elephant but it can't take out the thorn in its own foot, even when that thorn is causing its starvation and ultimate death!

Compared with the Lion, Androcles is a weak and puny creature. But he has the unique capacity to diagnose the cause for the lion's handicap and take out the thorn in its foot.

What did Androcles offer to the Lion and what did he get in return? He took out a tiny thorn in the lion's foot, spending under 30 minutes of his time and he got his whole life back in return!

How often we may be handicapped due to some thorns in our bodies, minds or relationships and suffer endlessly, unable to take them out, on our own? Sometimes, we may not even be aware of the hidden thorn. Each one of us, sometimes, need an Androcles, to help us get rid of our thorns. But we may not be as humble as the Lion, to seek help from apparently weaker or stronger people. Our ego may prevent us from seeking help.

How much better our lives could be, if we can behave like the Lion and Androcles, in seeking help and giving meaningful help? Taking out tiny thorns and getting lives back!

Lastly, how many of us intentionally or callously insert thorns into minds, bodies or relationships, instead of taking some of them out, in the short time each of us have, on this planet Earth?

#14 He insulted me

When does his pen become your pen?

I heard a spiritual teacher giving the bare bones of this idea on TV many years ago. I have put flesh on the bones.

He said "Suppose someone is trying to give his pen to you. It does not look good and you do not wish to receive it. When does his pen become your pen?"

It happens only when ALL the following events are fulfilled".

1. Your eyes focus on the pen held in his extended hand.
2. You show your readiness to receive it, extending your hand and opening your palm.
3. While seeing his pen moving towards your palm or even while feeling the pen being placed in it, you do not withdraw your hand.
4. You meekly grasp the pen placed in your palm.
5. You take the pen and place it in your pocket
6. You make sure you do not lose the pen.

If you fail to fulfill even one of the above conditions, his pen can not be with you.

Now think of all the ACTIONS you can take to avoid possessing his pen.

1. You LOOK AWAY from the pen. Failing this -
2. You DO NOT extend your hand or DO NOT open your palm showing your willingness to receive the pen. A pen can not be placed in a closed palm. Failing this –
3. When you see his hand moving towards your open palm and feel the pen being placed in it, you immediately withdraw your hand and let the pen fall to the ground, surprising him. Failing this -
4. You drop the pen as soon as he places it in your hand, shocking him. Failing this -
5. You take the pen behaving like a gentleman and go away. At the earliest opportunity you quietly drop it in the trash can with a smile on your lips for tricking him.

You thus have plenty of opportunities to avoid becoming the victim of the unwanted pen. When you fail to use these opportunities, is it fair to blame him for his success in transferring his pen to you?

You can now apply this simplistic analogy to adult life experiences - when somebody (say Paul) is trying to insult you or has already done it. Simply replace the pen in the above story by the anger, insult or abuse, someone is trying to pass on to you or already passed on to you successfully and you are stewing yourself. Give the same treatment to that person as described in the story.

Suryanarayana Chennapragada (aka 'C S) offers solo and group classes on Meditation, Gentle Yoga and Stressful Relationships,

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