

The Human Experience Pt 8: letting go (another name for forgiveness)

Andrew arrives in rather a distressed state, saying "Sorry for being late Frank, I've had a hell of a day.... I just hate George with a passion. He blows in without any prior warning and demands everything be ready, and then rolls his eyes when he has to wait for me to get things together. What really pisses me off is that he thinks we haven't any demands other than to be at his beck and call. And what's more ..."

"Hey, hold on Andrew! Just settle for a minute. I'll get you a beer." Frank returns, beers in hand. Andrew's first sip takes two thirds of the glass. Obviously, he is still very agitated. Moments pass. Andrew apologises, explaining that George is the company's Chief Financial Officer; a person he avoids because of his arrogance and unreasonable demands.

"A few years ago, he accused me of being incompetent at a staff meeting and then went on to highlight all the errors I'd made..." says Andrew "since then I just have to hear his voice and I seethe with hatred."

"Hatred is a little strong isn't it?"

"Oh no ... hate is just right!"

Nourishing our inner space

I'm sure Andrew is not the only one on the planet who has had, or currently has, such relationships; the consequences for which are feelings of resentment, anger, loathing, bitterness and acts of revenge. We, the aggrieved, can be tortured for one day or for a lifetime over such relationships. You can just imagine Frank observing his friend's angst and at the same time wondering why he can't see that he's causing his own pain and suffering.

In the mid 70's I graduated from Teachers College and was confronted with my first class of 43 grade six students. Some 15 years later I met one of the students from that class. "Why did you hate me?" he asked. I was shocked, confronted and embarrassed by the accusation. "Warren, what makes you think I hated you?" I replied. "You just did!" he said.

There was no malicious intent on my part but on reflection I did hate him, and the consequence was the same. I judged him harshly with belittling disregard and my tone of voice would have told him that I hated him. I hated his interruptions, his questions I couldn't answer or thought he should have known the answers to, or that he dobbed on a classmate. Worst of all, he looked a wimp. Hate sums it up well and in retrospect, I see how Warren felt hated by me.

I cannot remember if our conversation ended with me acknowledging the truth of my past feelings towards him, but I do remember genuinely apologising for my attitude towards him. I remember that, on parting, there was a feeling of goodwill, a confidence that our past was behind us. Like Andrew in the story above, Warren had held hatred... ten years or more holding the memories of his despised grade six teacher. Years of wondering why he was singled out for such treatment. I can imagine that any sharing about his primary school days would be coloured by "that teacher". There would have been the inevitable sting of the feelings of being persecuted and wronged all over again.

That chance meeting between Warren and myself was a time of letting go, even forgiveness of past. The occasion didn't have extended explanations or extensive analysis of the past events, nothing at all to be truthful. It was no more than a four minute conversation between the two of us. Our heart and minds were cleansed and our lives renewed by our change of hearts.

There are several lessons in this serendipitous moment. For Warren, he could have taken, at any time in his life, the opportunity to let go of the mental anguish of his own memories of his grade six experience. In doing so he would have been freed of 'harbouring his past'. Through our chance meeting he was able to see me in a different light. Perhaps he was willing to change his mind, have a new stance and a new idea and this enabled him to have a new set of feelings. However, if Warren thinks it is about a chance meeting, I suggest that it will not be long before he is trapped in another resentment. If, on the other hand, he is able to see the power of his thinking to self-create his present he will have learnt a great lesson indeed.

We'll explore other lessons next issue... ■ ■

**"Forgiveness does not change the past,
but it does enlarge the future."**

Paul Boese

Dutch botanist, known more for his quotes than for his research in science.

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