

16 HEALING ABUSE AND VICTIMHOOD

"It's clear to me now that I set myself up. Strange as it sounds, I was comfortable in the role of a victim; I've practiced it all my life. I didn't realize I caused the trauma that was my constant companion," Richard volunteered.

"It seemed to benefit me to show how wounded I was, how much of a victim I was, because people didn't tend to hold me accountable. It seemed to save me from further punishment and put me in control. I can see, however, the first step in the process of becoming a 'victim' was my choice to be 'victimized.'

KEY THOUGHT—There are no victims, only volunteers. We volunteer with the realities we hold.

"As I look at it, I can see I purposely played the victim role to keep people from victimizing me! What manipulation, what a twisted way I've used people," he mumbled to himself. "As I think about it, I fed on the energy of fear. It was that and anger. They seemed to be my only two choices. I really have some work to do if I'm going to change the foundation of my relationships from fear and anger to Love.

"I believe Love is the most powerful force on earth. It seems one of the benefits of giving up blame and guilt and letting go of my ball and chain is regaining my power. Is that it? Does this mean the choices I make are the key?" he asked hopefully.

"That's right, and the new choices you've been making today are grounding you in your power," I offered.

"Then you're saying that the power I lost playing the victim becomes available for me to consciously recreate my life? To think about every part of me being aligned with and creating out of Love is pretty exciting stuff!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, and it takes work. It is not an event that happens in a single moment, but a process that results from being responsible for what you set up in life. Notice that the Truth is safe and healing. Now that you are aware of behavior patterns that don't serve you, you are in a position to change them. That's empowerment !

KEY THOUGHT—When you choose to be aware of behavior patterns that don't serve you, you are in a position to change them. That's empowerment !

"It sounds like the only way you thought you could step into your power, other than through victimhood, was through hostility."

"That is exactly what I thought. Without my anger, I was powerless," Richard confided.

"Hostility is one of the most addictive, damaging drugs there is. Every person who engages in it needs their fix to keep their pain suppressed. Those who use this drug

encourage others to do the same because they themselves have not faced what they have suppressed with their own anger. Often, the rationalization that we have a 'right' to our anger is used to justify holding on to this form of self-abuse. We must be willing to deal with what we have hidden from ourselves and stop using that drug if healing is to occur."

"What are you talking about?"

"Do drugs suppress pain?" He nodded. "If you look at someone who is extremely hostile, you will always find deep emotional pain. Hostility sets up body chemistry that suppresses pain. Using hostility is like using any other drug. If one stops using their addictive substance, in this case the internal chemistry produced by hostility, they will go into withdrawal when the pain the drug has suppressed surfaces. That is the point at which the craving gets so strong many return to their supplier for another fix."

"One of the biggest challenges for the hostility addict is that the supplier is internal, a tricky pusher from which to break contact. Hostility must be treated like any other drug—its use must stop—if one is determined to recover. The other challenge is that society is the enabler."

Richard coughed. "What do you mean, enabler? What's that?"

"In traditional drug and alcohol treatment, the enabler is the person who supports the user by covering for or assisting him or her in keeping up the habit. For example, a husband who drinks to oblivion every weekend doesn't have to deal with his poor performance at work if his wife calls his boss and makes excuses for him. If he were required to face his boss and admit he had a hangover, he would have to deal with the consequences of his behavior. He might get fired if his boss knew what was going on."

He scowled. "If she didn't cover for him, there would be no paycheck and her family would starve."

"That's a great rationalization, the one most people use to avoid facing their problems. They justify addictive behavior and tolerate it as necessary because of thoughts like that. I invite you to interview a woman who has been there. If you could establish the cost to her mental, physical and emotional health, the strain on her children and other aspects of her life, it would be enormous. The impact of the anguish would be incalculable—hardly worth a paycheck. People deserve to live in gentle, Loving environments where aliveness, delight and joy are the norm. Anything less is an insult to the human spirit. With tools, it is possible for every person to create such a life."

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"I see what enabling is and I'm getting the idea that life can be different, but I don't understand what it means when you say society becomes the enabler."

"Any system that is set up to make it appear that abusive behavior is acceptable, desirable or necessary enables people who engage in that behavior to continue. People often support abuse in the world without realizing there is any option, that there is anything they can do about it. They don't speak up, similar to your experience as a kid where you kept the family secrets.

"Like the woman who continues to accept the abuse of an alcoholic husband in order to maintain her lifestyle, society rationalizes that the behavior of the hostility addict is required to maintain itself. The question, 'Do we need hostile behavior to maintain our society?' is an incorrect question. Hostility is an integral part of our current culture. The real question we should be asking is: 'Is that aspect of 'civilization' which requires violence worth perpetuating?'"

"How does society enable hostile people?"

"Richard, think of the functions and jobs that exist in our culture that support hostility as a normal and acceptable behavior; often the bully is not just tolerated, but welcomed. Many bureaucracies are fueled by hostility; in excess of fifty percent of the national budget is used to fund our war-making capabilities. How many of these activities do you suppose are patterned after the abuse many people learned in childhood?"

"Probably the majority. How did those patterns begin for most people?" Richard asked.

"Many children are raised in homes where being beat up verbally, physically and emotionally is normal. They presume maltreatment to be a part of life. They usually hate the abuse and their abusers, but people tend to become what they hate. They then contribute to the society which, in turn, accommodates them by creating ways that they can earn a living by being abusive, thus maintaining those patterns set in childhood. By this action, society fulfills the role of the enabler and the cycle is passed on to the next generation. The mistreated, who are now in control, tend to become abusers themselves. Abuse does not become sane because it is institutionalized, accepted or looks normal."

"Well, it is necessary to fight back and protect yourself," he said in an argumentative tone.

"It is participation in that kind of thinking that is causing violence to become the norm in our culture. People tend to be so close to what they do, they cannot see their own insanity. Be assured that from within the society ruled by the 'volcano gods,' sacrificing a young maiden now and then was not bizarre. Torturing and burning people at the stake was not strange from within the belief system of the Inquisitors—it was a 'reasonable' way to save souls. Reason, when not consciously governed, can justify anything it can conceive of, anything it decides to do.

"We live in a world where murder, war and violence are justified and condoned. Verbal, emotional and physical abuses are considered standard in many relationships and family systems. Parents lash out at children; teachers think it reasonable, in the name of

'discipline,' to verbally abuse, attack and put down the children they are 'teaching.' A child who kills is no longer an uncommon phenomenon.

"The media regularly portray 'little violences' as acceptable. Family members at each other's throats—attack, sarcasm and put-downs are presented as witty, normal, human interaction. Ever wonder why the divorce rate is so high? Healthy relationships are seldom represented or modeled anywhere in our world or media."

"Where have I been all my life?" He said, as he fumbled for words. "I've never thought about how previous generations or the media impact us. It never occurred to me that the world could be any different. I've never conceived that my hostility supports and contributes to the dynamic of violence in the world."

"Look around, you are not alone, Richard. These little violences rarely strike the sensibilities of anyone who has been trained to think of these forms of insult to human integrity as 'funny' and acceptable. From within the monumental violence of the way our world works, 'little violences' are seen as meaningless. I believe they are the tributaries that join to produce the destructive river of violence so prevalent in our world culture.

"In my experience, the reason for monumental violence is that many learn violence from conception—violence in thought, word and action. Its harmful nature in the family has, to a great degree, been ignored, though it is the beginning point of all conflict, divorce, murder and war. Children and adults are so confused as to what is reasonable, they often do not know when they are abusing others, being abused or abusing themselves. The end of this insanity on our planet begins when each of us acquires and uses the tools to heal the violence we do to ourselves and others. Peace is not an objective, it is the pathway to sanity and healing."

KEY THOUGHT—The tools used to produce a result always produce a result like the tools.

"Fear and violence have been with us for all of history, Michael. I want to live in peace as much as the next guy, but do you honestly think you can eliminate our world's insanities with these tools? Sounds like an impossible dream."

"Do you believe fear is a natural thing for us as human beings?" Richard agreed. "I think we've bought into a lie. I believe it is time for us to confront the lie and face ourselves! It is time to heal the structures that support mental, emotional, spiritual, verbal and physical abuse. Hostility and violence in every form, within families, communities and nations, must come to an end if we humans are to survive, let alone live in peace. Taking responsibility for one's own hostility and refusing 'the fix' each time the mind automatically offers it is one of the keys to healing and aliveness.

"A shocking belief held by many people is that peace is not possible nor is it desirable, and that violence is not only natural but necessary! It is a mind unwilling to be responsible, deal with its hurts and heal that promotes such an insane and barbaric

dogma. That 'peace is not possible' is a rationalization for violence used by those who cannot or will not control their own thoughts, words or actions. I recall my son at about age eight asking, 'Why are people killed to show that killing people is wrong?'

KEY THOUGHT—Einstein said that you cannot solve a problem with the same mind that created it. The hostile mind is insane and cannot solve its problems. They can only be solved with the mind-set of Love.

"Let us have the courage to recover our lives and do the unthinkable: Question everything."

Richard and I decided to stretch our legs by taking a walk to the lake. A brisk walk up the hill left us both puffing but refreshed by the clean Ozark air.