

## Lesson 115: Letting go of the Past

Past adverse experiences, typically occurring early in life, tend to be progressive in that the damaging effects can keep negatively affecting the quality of your life for many years to come, just as if the adversity itself was still occurring in the present. The problem is that the damaging effects, though objectively experienced in your reality, are not identified nor are they understood as actual damaging effects. Whether or not you recall the adverse experience as it really did occur or as you perceive it occurred the event could still leave an unseen imprint in the unconscious mind, which results in exhibiting certain impulsive thought and behavior patterns. Over time, these internal impulses are habituated, often expressed as dysfunctional thoughts and highly charged emotional reactions or defense mechanisms carried to the extreme. These unconscious internal imprints not only put in motion dysfunctional behaviors patterns, as well as a host of other extreme reactive behaviors to trivial things experienced in day-to-day life, they can also encroach on your relationships where they can wreak a great deal of personal havoc. Because these imprints dwell in the unconscious region of the mind, they lie hidden from conscious awareness, while adversely affecting the quality of your life without any awareness on your part. These undetected embedded imprints make it very difficult to overcome past adverse experiences until some cause or need arises sufficient to be willing to identify them. Thus, letting go of the past is not just about making a conscious choice to do so, it is really about identifying what is it about the past that makes it so difficult to let go. The focus of this discussion is to help you let go of the past by pointing you in the direction of recognizing the mental and emotional marks these undetected imprints encode in the unconscious region of your mind and how the internal impulse of them are actually affecting your reality.

It is very difficult to live “fully” in present if the past is still dictating how you are experiencing your life now, just as it will continue to dictate your future, if not let go. The problem is that you may not be aware of having been adversely affected by the past, as these memories often fade over time or are suppressed or repressed for the sake of psychological survival. Second, is that you may not know to what extent you have been adversely affected. Third, is that you may not know exactly what is it about the past you need to let go of. Fourth, is that actually letting go of your self-made protective defense mechanisms can be downright scary. Letting down walls of perceived protection can be just as difficult as it is to let go of the past, as doing so can cause you to feel unprotected, and therefore, vulnerable. Because the damaging effects from past adverse experiences do not lie on the surface where they are more easily detected and are more easily corrected and consequently overcome, detecting them often takes some degree of internal digging to root out all the mental and emotional attachments, which generally doesn't happen voluntarily. People are not inclined to seek outside help until some aspect of their personal reality becomes very dysfunctional or very threatening. Discovering that you may not be living as fully in the present as you think you are or

have been often means taking on some uncomfortable methods of mental reconstruction, which might even require a complete mental overhaul, depending on how damaging the adverse affects have been. Thus, the process of letting go of the past starts by discovering how certain internal stimuli and external influences are keeping you locked into the past, thus affecting your ability to let go of the past.

Emotions play a very big role in how adversities are experienced at the time they are occurring, as well as how they continue to be experienced long afterwards. The stronger the emotional reaction, the more your personal reality is adversely affected from then on, which is likely to have an adverse impact on how you experience your interpersonal relationships and can even affect the achievement of your goals. Because emotions do not come prepackaged as a one-size-fits-all, they are not equally distributed from person to person; therefore, no two people can feel or express their emotions in the same exact way. Some people are inclined to express very strong emotions. Consequently, they are more reactive to adverse influences, whether internally or externally stimulated and whether or not it relates to the past or to the present, which makes controlling and balancing the emotions just as much a juggling act as it is a challenge. Others tend to suppress their emotions, but they too are no less reactive to certain internal stimuli or external influences. The difference is that they respond to the stimulus by using very creative mental tactics, as opposed to emotional expressions.

No one can possibly predict to what extent the emotions will be affected as the result of an adverse experience, nor can anyone predict if or how long the emotions will continue to perpetuate the adverse effects into the future or the creative ways it will do so. This includes suppressed emotions too, which are having no less of an internal impact than are strong emotional reactions. Although emotional responses can be kept in check and balance by making a conscious choice to do so, it is a losing battle when an undetected internal force is operating beneath the surface of conscious awareness and is acting on the emotions, sight unseen. People who tend to be emotionally over reactive are not aware that they are doing so and even if they are aware that they are overreacting, they simply do not see their reactions as being a problem or a threat to anyone. In fact, they generally believe that they are acting appropriately, in an attitude of self-convinced self-defense, though perceived at best. They don't see how their emotional overreactions are perpetuating a long string of undesirable effects attached to the past adversity that may be wreaking all kinds of havoc in their relationships and perhaps elsewhere in their reality, thus adversely affecting the reality of others as well.

The same holds true for those who choose to suppress their emotions. Intentionally erecting an impenetrable fortress wall for the sake of maintaining emotional distance, as a means of personal protection from anyone perceived as a threat, even when no such condition exists, is far more damaging than it is protective because it speaks to unresolved internal issues, such as fear and mistrust, which demands control at all

times. Suppressing emotions is still a form of overreacting to the past and is no more living fully in the present than it is to emotionally over react. Both approaches still keep you clinging to the past. Although emotional balance is essential to letting go of the past and being fully present in the now, getting there is sometimes much easier said than done, but it can be done with further investigation.

The process of letting go of the past, which is a process, involves a myriad of mental activity in addition to maintaining emotional balance. Neither the mental plane nor the emotional plane precedes one another nor is one more important than the other is. Both planes are equally important and must work together in unison in order to let go of the past and live in the present. Placing too much emphasis on emotional balance equates to placing too little emphasis on your mental facilities, both need to work hand in hand, as one does support the other. Your attitude and your overall mental state of mind are no less important than the state of your emotions. Thus, it too requires equal attention, mostly because your mental state of mind is dependent on your cognitive abilities to process your past adverse experiences from as much of an objective perspective as is possible, which too is far easier said than done, but can be done. The greater your cognitive ability to see things as they really are and not how they were or how they appear on the surface will have a positive impact on your emotions, which in turn will have a positive impact on your attitude, consequently, affecting your overall state of mind in a positive way.

The cognitive aspect of identification and making a conscious choice to let go of the past, as has been described in many of the past lessons, has everything to do with the lens you view the experiences you encountered in the past from. The more distorted the lens, the more distorted is the picture you see before you, thus, the more your past, present and future reality are distorted, the ramifications of which should be carefully considered. After all, it is your reality being affected, as well as the reality of those whom you adversely affect too. Like it or not, the responsibility for seeing things as they really are, objectively vs subjectively rests squarely on your shoulders. The biggest challenge you might have to face, which may be far more difficult than the truths you might discover about your reality, is accepting the fact that you are viewing your life's circumstances through a distorted lens. Because distorted perspectives are not easily discernible by the person doing the discerning, it often takes outside intervention, such as counseling or therapy with someone trained and capable of helping you see the picture before you more clearly. Sometimes even a friend, relative or a co-worker has enough insight to help you see what you cannot see for yourself, but this too is risky because such personal interventions can lead to hard feelings and can wreck a relationship through no fault of the person who is trying to help. It would be easy to suggest that if you are having trouble sorting through your own illusions and delusions you should consider seeking outside intervention, preferably professional. However, that means having to admit to something you might be adversely opposed to or in denial of because you are certain

that your perspectives are indeed accurate, and therefore, are objective in every sense of the word, even though they are grossly subjective.

Knowing how to view past adverse experiences from an objective perspective is tricky, given the human propensity that by virtue of just being human tends to lean in the direction of subjectively viewing life, as if the mind is on automatic pilot. The problem is that the mind is on automatic pilot, which is why it is so difficult to process life objectively. The brain, though it has evolved significantly, still processes the events of ordinary day-to-day life as though there is some kind of eminent danger lurking out there in the jungle of everyday life. Thus, the brain resorts to its innate fight or flight instinct in a nanosecond and immediately transmits a warning signal to every part of the body, which puts the entire body on physiological alert. Because the mind reacts habitually, objectivity is a lost cause before you even get out of the starting gate. Thus, the challenge lies in harnessing your own subjective perspectives and reeling them into objective reality so that you can realistically comprehend your past adverse experiences through an undistorted lens. Although it can be a struggle to see things as they really are, given that the way you see things about your reality may seem to be what they really are from your perspective, which you believe is objective, nonetheless, it is still worth the effort of viewing these things from other perspectives. Your willingness to allow other perspectives to enter into the picture, collectively speaking, paints a very different picture that comes into focus more clearly. It's a win-win situation because it gives you an opportunity to put things in proper perspective, which in turn, makes letting go of the past a realistic proposition, thus, allowing you to actually live in the present and not have to rely on self-defense mechanisms for protection, especially those that are carried to the extreme.

Processing past adverse influences that are still acting on your reality today, wherever you are on the path of your life, requires a little more cognitive effort that extends beyond the boundaries of your perspectives and the powerful influence of your emotions. The process also requires a close up examination of your beliefs, especially your core beliefs, which may be long out of sight for a number of reasons, but nonetheless are no less worthy of exploring. Beliefs are both fixed and variable. Fixed beliefs are generally of family, cultural, societal, religious and other environmental orientation, all too often based on false or misleading and even superstitious assumptions, dating back to many generations. These beliefs are generally accepted at face value at some point or time in your life, whether in childhood or as an adult, and therefore, are not generally challenged as to their validity or worthiness. Thus, they remain unexamined, locked in the vault of your subconscious mind where they continually act on you and your reality without any intervention or conscious awareness on your part. When left unexamined, they can actually wreak just as much havoc in your life as can your distorted perspectives and unbalanced emotions that when combined, are a recipe for personal disaster. When these beliefs are left unexplored or

unchallenged, they can surely steer you far from the safety of the harbor, but when tucked safely in the harbor, perspectives are not distorted nor are beliefs so fixed that they cannot be more realistically aligned. When beliefs are realigned and perspectives are not distorted, they serve as a compass pointing you back to the safety of the harbor when you find yourself sailing in the stormy seas of life.

Variable beliefs are those that you take on in response to circumstances, which are not the same as your fixed and seemingly unchangeable beliefs. These belief patterns can change just as surely as the weather changes because they are temporary in nature and are subject to all sorts of internal stimuli and external influences. Unlike the assumed nature of so-called fixed beliefs, variable beliefs are very subjective and are prone to all sorts of on the spot whims and fancies. Thus, they tend to be flighty, here today and gone tomorrow, which is why they are so variable, unlike their counterpart, which are more steadfast and tend towards longevity, sometimes even lifelong. Variable beliefs are easily swayed, especially by the opinions and beliefs of others, which of course, changes depending on the duration of those influences in your life. Thus, the people who come and go in your life hold sway on certain of your beliefs and can cause you to form new beliefs or alter your beliefs in response to the impact they have in your reality, which too changes over time, as they come and go. Whether fixed or variable, all your beliefs should be examined from time to time to discern the effective or ineffective role they are playing in your life and whether or not they are serving you well. However, you will not know for sure unless you take the time to examine them and do so honestly, otherwise, you will be defeating your purpose.

Included in the lineup of cognitive processing, with respect to identifying adverse influences and letting go of the past is the issue of negative thought patterns. Like perspectives and beliefs, negative thought patterns also function on automatic pilot and are no less of a mental and emotional menace than are distorted perspectives or unchallenged, invalidated beliefs. Negative thought patterns turn into habituated mental and emotional reactions to internal stimuli and external influences of the same or similar caliber as the event that initiated the dysfunction to begin with, whether perceived or real. These dysfunctional and self-destructive thought patterns, embedded in the psyche and in the brain, feed into each other like a broken record that just keeps playing the same part of the song over and over, never getting past the skip in the record. The problem is that most people are not aware that this is happening because it is an internal process, though it is expressed and felt externally, therefore, they do not know that there are connecting dots. Once these destructive patterns are internally embedded, responding to similar life events gives way to automatic dysfunctional thinking...or as the case may be...no thinking, and therein lies the problem. Embedded thought patterns are so mechanical that they require little or no cognitive effort. Thus, the act of thinking rationally is rendered ineffective, giving way to effortless non-cognitive mental and emotional reactions.

The antidote to overcoming embedded dysfunctional negative thought patterns is to overwrite them with functional thought patterns that are positive in nature. However, this action not only requires cognitive effort to identify the embedded pattern, it requires making a conscious choice to do so because there are no magic wands, no potions, no quick fixes or overnight successes that will magically erase these negative thought patterns. Overcoming negative thought patterns is a mental task that requires applied conscious awareness, i.e., a constant state of mindfulness, until rational thinking becomes just as habituated as irrational thinking became habituated. This means being conscientious of the fact that whether an actual adversity was encountered and you are still reacting to its influence in your interpersonal relationships or you are reacting to something you perceive and believe did occur, are no less adversely affecting your interpersonal relationships and are wreaking havoc in your life. The point is that the destructive and very damaging mental reactions will not suddenly cease until you make a conscious effort to affect a change in your habituated embedded patterns of thinking, which you change by way of identification.

Now, even though you have begun to calm the stormy seas by making a conscious effort to control your emotions, have been willing to view your circumstances from a more accurate or truer perspective, have challenged your fixed and variable beliefs, have become aware of your habituated thought and reactive behavior patterns, there is still more internal work to be done. There remains the important matter of discerning whether your expectations are realistic or unrealistic. As difficult as it can be to view the circumstances of your life through lenses you are not accustomed to looking through, discerning your expectations objectively is no less a challenge because this too requires objective honesty, as well as focused clarity. Much like your habituated thought and behavior patterns, expectations are no less rooted in your psyche, and therefore, are just as troublesome. Reacting to a past event that adversely affected some aspect of your life or reacting to events that closely approximate the past event is an indication that something about your expectations is out of alignment and needs to be realigned. Whether the event that occurred in the past is real or is perceived as a real event, it is still running your life, evidenced by the fact that you are knowingly or unknowingly reacting to it. Consequently, the event is still ruling your current reality, is threatening to undermine your future reality and is doing so through your expectations, just as it is controlling your emotions, as well as your thought and behavior patterns, negatively influenced by your unchallenged beliefs and distorted perspectives.

When an adverse experience is encountered, whether in childhood or later in life, it is usually followed by an unrealistic expectation, which falsely suggests that the same or a similar event is expected to play out during the course of your life because it is the condition you are familiar with, and therefore, are accustomed to experiencing. Consequently, what you expect will happen, now or again in the future and does so by way of mental attraction, fueled by your own negative thought patterns. The only way to

stop the adverse affect that occurs from acting on unrealistic expectations is to examine the basis of your expectations. Here again, unchallenged and invalidated beliefs play an important role because they not only influence your expectations, they are often the source of your unrealistic expectations, those you are aware of and those you are not aware of. Beliefs and expectations, whether realistic or unrealistic, are tightly woven together, thus the only real means of making an accurate distinction between the two is to examine how they are feeding into each other and supporting each other. This is not an easy process and it does take a bit of unraveling, much like peeling back the layers of an onion.

As you begin examining your expectations, you will find that not only are your beliefs linked to your expectations, so are your perspectives, which underlie your beliefs, acting as a foundation for them. As you adjust the lens and bring your perspectives into focus, your expectations of yourself and even of others begin to take on a different look and feel. The more you adjust your lens, the more you begin to see a very different picture or at the very least the picture that has always been there, but was cloudy and distorted, comes into focus, and as it does, reality starts to look and feel more objective than subjective. The clearer the picture is, the less likely your expectations will remain unrealistic, as they too will be brought into focus. The adjustment of your expectations, beliefs and perspectives has an adjusting affect on your thought patterns, making it easier to alter, change or even discard those that are not serving you well. Collectively, all these cognitive internal adjustments help to stabilize your emotions, calming you down, while calming down the stormy seas of your life at the same time. As your expectations of yourself and of others shifts into a more realistic perspective, your altered beliefs in turn will support your altered and more realistic expectations. Over time and in conjunction with your beliefs and perspectives, your expectations will continue to develop and redevelop, always moving in a more realistic and objective direction. As the old unrealistic expectations fall away, eventually they will drop off your radar entirely, no longer driving you in the wrong direction.

However, these internal alterations do not happen automatically, but occurs by way of periodic examinations and is a necessary ongoing cognitive function because life brings about many unforeseen and unexpected changes. As these changes occur, new situations, circumstances and events will unfold and with them comes a new set of thought and behavior patterns, beliefs, perspectives and expectations, all of which will have a positive or a negative impact on your emotions. It is truly a lifelong balancing act, which requires constant attention to what is going on around you and being consciously aware of how undesired and even desired change is affecting you, as well as all the aspects of your reality.

At this point in the discussion, it should be evident that letting go of the past is not a one-time event attributed to a conscious choice to do so, which is not likely to stick,

especially when there is little or no evidence of change in spite of good intentions. Making a conscious choice to let go of the past is certainly a good start, but it is just the beginning; it is only the top layer of the onion, but there are many layers that need to be peeled back. While positive thinking certainly has its merits, on its own the well-intended effort will only get you just so far. The reality is that you cannot expect to change embedded thought or behavior patterns merely by wishful thinking anymore than you can alter your beliefs, adjust your perspectives and successfully manage your emotions and approach life with realistic expectations, while there is an underlying internal force at work, provoking your reactions and your emotions every step of the way. The operative word with respect to embedded thought and behavior patterns is “embedded,” which means that these patterns are indeed embedded in your psyche and must be revealed. The fact that they are embedded is why well intended positive thinking methodologies falls quickly by the wayside, regardless of what any positive thinking guru professes. Like it or not, the nature of embedded thought and behavior patterns correspond to and support unconscious repetition. Thus, letting go of the past takes concentrated effort and a willingness to peel back every layer until your reality is brought into objective perspective, which is not easy to do. Overwriting complex negative states of mind takes cognitive work; it is an intellectual and mental effort that requires a commitment to seeing the process through no matter the difficulty.

In closing, we hope that through the course of this discussion it is apparent that while it is absolutely essential to your over well being to let go of the past, it should be clear that doing so requires a great deal of mental reconditioning and emotional rebalancing. As always, please feel free to share your thoughts, comments or personal experiences.

Many Blessings,

Linda, Z and the Collective We