

Stick and Stones

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There is a saying that has been around for a long time, it is "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Have you heard of it? We used to believe it but no longer. We have realized now that words do have the ability to inflict pain and long term damage on our fellow human beings. Sometimes the words we use are meant to inflict hurt and damage, to "get back" at someone else for hurting us. Sometimes people use hurtful words to put others down in an attempt to make themselves look better. And sometimes people use hurtful words and they aren't even aware of the impact they have. We all know people like that don't we? The bullies, the bossy overbearing people, the control freaks and the very insecure. Sometimes when we look in the mirror we can see that person there too if we are truthful with ourselves. I have learned that if I think someone else is acting in a negative way, chances are that that behavior is probably within me too, I just have to acknowledge it. Remember, Buddha said we have good and bad within us all. We all have the ability to do both good and bad, to bring compassion or sorrow to others. What do we really want to do?

Everyone received a piece of paper when you came in this morning. I hope you followed instructions and kept it looking pristine, no folds or wrinkles. What I am going to ask you to do is not my personal idea but one shared with me recently. It is a simple yet profound idea. Hold up your paper so I can see it. Tell me, how does your paper look? Does it look perfect? Does it look flawless and unblemished? That is the way people are when we come in to this world. We are all unblemished, flawless and a work of art. However, when we hear unkind, harsh words said to us, either by bullies if we are young or by bossy, control freaks if we are adults, something happens to us. Now take that piece of paper you have in your hand and think of the harsh words you have ever said or have ever heard said around you. For every word you can think of, start to crush up your piece of paper. Think of harsh words like "stupid", "how many times do I have to tell you?", "don't you get it?", "did you hear what happened to her yesterday?", "just do it my way." Now that you have your paper crinkled into a ball, reflect on this . . . when hurtful words are tossed out, those words have the same effect on a person, child or adult, as you had in wadding up that paper. Not a pretty picture is it?

Now open the paper and smooth it out as carefully and smoothly as possible. Tell it you're sorry, and see how that erases the wrinkles, the scars from the mistreatment. Hold up your piece of paper. Smoothing it out and saying "I'm sorry" doesn't help much, does it? And people are so much more fragile — and valuable — than a piece of paper. The paper can never be the same again, no matter what we do. The same is true for the people we hurt with our words. No amount of "I'm sorry" can make up for unkind thoughts and words, not completely.

Let's all remember the lesson of the crumpled paper the next time we are tempted to use unkind words or even to think unkind thoughts. Remember, we are all interconnected as Buddha has taught us, so if we are interconnected then when we hurt someone else, we are also hurting ourselves. We know that our negative behaviors will come back around to us, it is only a matter of time.

Now this leads to an interesting thought. If we are like that paper and are all crumpled up by other people, does that mean that we can hold on to resentments for the words others have said to us, to seek revenge? After all, they shouldn't have said those hurtful things to us, right? Does that mean we are justified in carrying a grudge, being angry for years and years on end long after the hurt? I don't think so. This is where the Buddhist concept of "Non-Attachment" comes along. If you are like me, I always associated the concept of non-attachment with positive thoughts, people I love and things that I like. We become attached to things, think we are that stuff and we have a difficult time letting that stuff go, whether those possessions are clothing, books, attitudes or ways of doing things. Then I read about non-attachment related to what we consider negative thoughts and emotions. It was an "ah ha" moment for me. I never realized that non-attachment referred to letting go of negative thoughts too. Think of those negative thoughts we all have . . . think of how many of these relate to you. Are you still hanging on to resentments, anger, a grudge, complaints? I imagine most of us are attached to those negatives. I have heard people expressing a resentment from an interaction that happened 30 years ago or of holding a grudge for an action that occurred 20 years ago. From the outside, maintaining our negative attachments for so long seems to be a bad idea. Why would we hold on to grudges and resentments? What does it serve? Think about this quote from Norman Vincent Peale, "Resentment or grudges do no harm to the person against whom you hold these feelings but every day and every night of your life, they are eating at you." Hmmmm, in other words, when you hold a grudge or hold on to a resentment you don't hurt the other person, you only hurt yourself. Confucius said, "To be wronged is nothing unless you continue to remember it." Wow, carrying a resentment or a grudge only hurts me and not the other person. Puts all of that in a different perspective doesn't it? That doesn't mean we have to be a doormat to everyone we meet. It simply means that we should learn to let go of our anger and resentments. Remember, forgiveness has nothing to do with the other person, it is about restoring calm to our hearts and minds. I recently read an article about "22 Habits of Unhappy People." One of those habits is Holding Grudges. Remember, this is about the habits of unhappy people. The article said "Do yourself a favor, forgive. This doesn't mean you need to become best buds with whoever has done you wrong, but come to terms with what has happened and understand that people

make mistakes. Forgiving will help free you of anxiety, stress and depression and allow you to have happier relationships. Free yourself of the hate, and move on."

This isn't easy, this letting go of our negative thoughts. Sometimes the negative thoughts seem to always be there. One of the best ways to start learning to let go of negative thoughts, resentments, grudges, and complaints is simply to practice awareness. When those negative thoughts pop out, and you know they will, recognize them, become aware of them, and identify what you are doing. That is awareness, the first step. Be aware and be in the moment. Practice non-attachment not only with things but also with resentments and complaints. You will feel better.

Let me close with a story I found quite a while ago. It is a story about non-attachment to the negatives in our lives. The story is called "The Law of the Garbage Truck" by David J. Pollay, a syndicated newspaper columnist.

The Law of the Garbage Truck

"How often do you let other people's nonsense change your mood? Do you let a bad driver, rude waiter, curt boss, or an insensitive employee ruin your day? Unless you're the Terminator, you're probably set back on your heels. However, the mark of your success is how quickly you can refocus on what's important in your life.

Sixteen years ago I learned this lesson. And I learned it in the back of a New York City taxi cab. Here's what happened.

I hopped in a taxi, and we took off for Grand Central Station. We were driving in the right lane when all of a sudden, a black car jumped out of a parking space right in front of us. My taxi driver slammed on his brakes, the car skidded, the tires squealed, and at the very last moment our car stopped just one inch from the other car's back-end.

I couldn't believe it. But then I couldn't believe what happened next. The driver of the other car, the guy who almost caused a big accident, whipped his head around and he started yelling bad words at us. How do I know? Ask any New Yorker, some words in New York come with a special face. And he even threw in a one finger salute! I couldn't believe it!

But then here's what really blew me away. My taxi driver just smiled and waved at the guy. And I mean, he was friendly. So, I said, "Why did you just do that? This guy could have killed us!" And this is when my taxi driver told me what I now call, "The Law of the Garbage Truck™." He said:

"Many people are like garbage trucks. They run around full of garbage, full of frustration, full of anger, and full of disappointment. As their garbage piles up, they look for a place to dump it. And if you let them, they'll dump it on you.

So when someone wants to dump on you, don't take it personally. Just smile, wave, wish them well, and move on. Believe me. You'll be happier.

So I started thinking, how often do I let *Garbage Trucks* run right over me? And how often do I take their garbage and spread it to other people at work, at home, or on the street? It was then that I said, "I don't want their garbage and I'm not going to spread it anymore."

Roy Baumeister, a psychology researcher from Florida State University, found in his extensive research that you remember bad things more often than good things in your life. You store the bad memories more easily, and you recall them more frequently.

So the odds are against you when a *Garbage Truck* comes your way. But when you follow *The Law of the Garbage Truck™*, you take back control of your life. You make room for the good by letting go of the bad. The bottom line is that successful people do not let *Garbage Trucks* take over their lives.

What about you? What would happen in your life, starting today, if you let more garbage trucks pass you by?

Here's my bet: You'll be happier. "

Let me end with a quote from Marianne Williamson:

"Always seek less turbulent skies.

Hurt. Fly above it.

Betrayal. Fly above it.

Anger. Fly above it.

You are the one who is flying the plane."

As the Buddha said, "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intention of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned."

Thank you.