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**"Those People"**  
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It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, ...it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, ... it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

I was in the gym this week when a person next to me asked, How do you feel about the killing of Osama? I replied, I don't feel one way or the other. This person asked why. I said that I don't choose to get caught up in the news and all the drama associated with it and that I've made a choice to listen to and read as little of the news as possible, to which this person offered, Well, I'm happy, and I hope they get all those people. I responded, Hmmm, closed my eyes and continued my work on my bike. The person was a non-native speaker of English, and a minority in more than one way.

I took a deep breath and reflected on I hope they get all those people. This is my reflection.

Many folks are experiencing their worst of times - at work, at home, at play and in relationship. Their worst of times are usually driven by fear, uncertainty, hopelessness, helplessness, despair, anger and insecurity - physical, mental, emotional, psychological, financial, social, etc. Many have resorted to a single solution they feel will result in the best of times. Their solution? Revenge.

What is revenge and what is sweet revenge?

Revenge is defined as harm done to someone as a punishment for harm they have done to you real or perceived. Sweet revenge is an emotion, real or perceived - a satisfaction, a pleasure - one experiences, from harming someone who has harmed them.

Revenge can be physical, mental or both. It's "sweet," neuroscientists tell us, because imaging studies indicate the brain centers that light up when we experience pleasure, enjoyment and satisfaction also light up when we act to commit, or consider, revenge.

These studies suggest we actually *feel* satisfaction - mentally, physically, emotionally or psychologically - when we punish others in some way for their being bad," wrong or otherwise harmful (whether directed towards us personally, or not) behavior.

When engaging in revengeful thoughts or actions, one assumes responsibility for punishing another or others who, one feels, deserves just punishment for making me feel bad, or wrong or deficient in some way, shape or form. Whether one actually acts out their revenge or simply considers engaging in revenge, the brains pleasure center lights up - the same pleasure sensation when we consider "getting those people."

Research points to the complex feeling or emotional dynamic of schadenfreude - the pleasure felt over someone else's misfortune or demise - comes into play when one is engaged in exacting

revenge.

According to this research, punishing others - even if irrational - is based on passion and emotion, not reason.

Revenge breeds revenge. Hate causes hate. The more the brain is activated by the anticipation of revenge, the more people are willing to engage in revenge in thought or deed. When we "win," we actually lose because we perpetuate the causes and conditions that lead to more hatred and its consequences. Why?

The amygdala part of our brain - our instinctual awareness - causes us to react to people, events, and circumstances we see as threats in order to protect ourselves, and the limbic (emotional) part of our brain brings us to respond emotionally - with fight, flight or fear - anything but rational or logical responses.

In this state of emotional reactivity where we experience anger, fear, territoriality, or the need to protect my turf (e.g., my physical space, my mental space, "me," i.e., my beliefs, world views, assumptions and the like), we split off from our cerebral cortex (the thinking, "rational center of our brain). Here, in this emotional state, revenge in the form of psychopathologies occurs. The genesis of "those people."

Here in this emotional state, we choose to mete out punishment, and visit revenge on another or others for no apparent reason - acting irrationally - even though while caught up in the emotional, revengeful act, one thinks they are being logical, rational and justified.

Dr. Edward Hallowell, psychiatrist and author of "Dare to Forgive" says there's a reason for the rise of revenge. It's because revenge satisfies. "It feels so good. It's a wonderfully triumphant feeling."

The victim

Revenge bubbles up as one begins to feel helpless victimized - that I am being harmed or threatened by forces out there" it, her, him or them. Mired in the quicksand of "victim consciousness," one needs to blame, and "revenge is often the only strategy that will set me free and allow me to experience the best of times.

"Those people" - the targets

Targets - individuals or groups that need to be punished because they are causing one's unhappiness, upset or helplessness exist on many levels. Targets include:

National: rich-poor; whites-blacks; gays-straight; fundamentalists-new agers; democrats-republicans; cash-flush-cash poor; liberals-conservatives; American flag lapel pin-wearers, non-pin wearers; pro-abortion-anti-abortion; gay marriage-mixed marriage; the thin-the obese; Hollywood types-plain types; liberal media-conservative media; the educated-the uneducated; pro-immigration-anti-immigration...

Workplace: leaders-managers; CEOs-employees; Americans-foreigners; exempt-non-exempt; line-staff; 52nd -floor folks-basement folks; male-female; team leader-team member; degreed/certified-non-degreed/non-certified...

Home: wife-husband; partner-lover; parents-children; in-laws (his/her family)-my family; upstairs neighbors-folks across the street; folks with new cars and expensive homes-folks with older cars and less-expensive homes...

(For the record, re: OBL, we killed him. We had no choice. We were in an us or him situation and if we didn't kill him, he was going to continue to do everything in his power to kill us." But let's move beyond OBL and consider how do we kill our enemy in a way that puts a stop to violence rather than escalates it? The question is how we extend and project our fears and anger on to those myriad others - the "targets" listed above and create the illusion that they are responsible for my unhappiness?)

"If only...!"

Revenge-seekers live in an if only world - If only I could punish, remove or even annihilate (fill in the blank with an individual or individuals, a group or groups), then I would experience pleasure, happiness or satisfaction."

So, what's "real" here?

The truth is one's perception of reality is so often skewed in favor of the one feeling harmed that one disconnects from true reality, failing to see the truth of what actually exists, favoring instead, an illusion. In this state of illusion, one projects their fears on to individual(s) or group(s) out there as the cause of their unhappiness and fear. In reality, their fear has been inside all along and if consciously explored would most often not be directly connected to their "target."

They've just never taken the time to explore their inner feelings and emotions to look for root causes. For them, it's just easier to blame others and then dwell in the satisfaction of exacting, or fantasizing about, revenge.

James Baldwin explains it well, *I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with (their own) pain.*

In one's "worst of times we expect and want others to meet our needs, even when our expectations are inappropriate. Our childhood fear-based reaction leaks out when, as adults, we feel helpless, hopeless and abandoned as many are feeling today. When they don't get the security they want, they may feel anger, resentment and even revengeful.

The antidote to revenge

Charlotte Bronte wrote, *"Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity or*

registering wrong."

Rather than blaming and seeking revenge, we could choose to get in touch with our needs and then fill them ourselves. When we choose to become self-responsible, an interesting phenomena occurs: there's no one to blame, no one to punish, no one with whom to get even."

Acting on feelings of revenge can become dangerous - like a drug or an addiction. The more they have, the more they want. For example, one might feel the need to exact revenge on this individual. It then escalates to that one, then this group, then that group all in order to maintain the sense of feeling safe, secure and satisfied even though their safety, security and satisfaction is ephemeral, fleeting, short-lived.

Unable to experience a true and real feeling of peace and security from inside, their addiction continues to tug at them not unlike the drug, food, alcohol, or sex addict, who needs to score one more fix, and another, and another to experience satisfaction or pleasure - while suppressing and denying their deeper fears and insecurities that continue to live, fester and grow inside. So, revenge becomes a way of life - at work, at home, in relationship and even at play - a lifelong self-sabotaging, self-limiting obsession and addiction.

So, what supports one to reduce and eliminate their conscious or unconscious need for vengeance?

Entering into a conscious practice of self-reflection and living intentionally from a place of understanding, empathy, compassion and forgiveness. This is not to say that one condones true and real wrongdoing. It is to suggest, however, one take a deep conscious look at how the addiction to revenge grips them and learn how to release that hold. The revenge-addicted are emotionally disabled - their denials notwithstanding. Moving past revenge is freeing on every level - mental, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual.

Since no one was born seeking revenge, the critical question is, How did I come to scapegoating, to blaming and to being vengeful? Where and how did I learn to want to punish others for my upset, unhappiness and dissatisfaction with my life?

This healthy, conscious and deeper process of inquiry can support one to move from a place of vengeance to a place of well-be-ing, and peace of mind, where one can take control of their life by taking back their power, and giving up the cloak of victim.

Inquiry supports one to moves from the amygdala and limbic brain to the cortex, the level of the brain involved in thinking, rationality, problem-solving, goal-setting, and planning. The cortex provides one with foresight and insight, important abilities that help one to be less reactive and to see the consequences of their (vengeful) decisions before acting on them.

The cortex also enables one to consciously name and sort out ones feelings and emotions and become less reactive - less vengeful - in thought or deed, allowing one to let go, to be more understanding and considerate. It's here that one acts from having a conscience," not from emotional, unintelligent reactivity.

When we learn how to relate to our anger, hatred, despair, and frustration fully and properly, we empower ourselves and become liberated, free from the grip of the vengeance-seeking victim.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- Does your reactivity to some individuals or groups adversely affect your quality of life?
- Do you feel personally attacked by individuals or groups who differ from you? Why?
- Do you often blame others?
- Are you a "don't get mad, get even" or an "eye for an eye" type of person?
- Do you prefer to upset some folks to make them unhappy?
- Do you keep mental notes of people who wronged you?
- Do you live by the mantra, "I can forgive but I can't forget?"
- Do you verbally attack others when you can? Why?
- Have you gotten (or thought about getting) revenge on someone in the last six months?
- Do you tend to stereotype individuals or groups?
- When you look at the cards (of life) you've been dealt, do you accuse someone of dealing from the bottom of the deck?
- What was your experience of revenge, punishing others and "getting even" like when you were growing up?

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