

How to Stop Giving Away Your Personal Power and Freedom (Part - I)

There are Two People Living Inside Your Skin.

How many reminders have you received so far that it's a new year and it's time to make your annual resolutions? How many emails, newsletters or magazine articles have you read recently that promise to teach you how to keep all your resolutions? In one sense I'm going to follow suit. After all, it is a new year, thus a perfect time to talk about change and growth. On the other hand, so much of what is sent out concerning resolution keeping is nothing more than re-hashes from advice given in years gone by. In this regard, I hope to be different by offering some fresh ideas.

You would think that with all the advice (sage or not) floating around that India would by now be full of outstanding resolution keepers. Yet time and again so many start the year with high-sounding and noble goals but then end it with impoverished excuses. In fact, this is so prevalent that many people refuse to even make any New Year's resolutions. Why do you think it's so easy to start with such good intentions and end with such disappointing results? Do you think something might be missing here? Might it be possible that personal growth and positive change require more than simply verbalizing a desire or writing down a list of wishes? Why is it so easy to start and so difficult to finish? In order to best understand this "start but don't finish" phenomenon you must first understand the root of the problem. At the heart of the issue lies the fact that we all, in essence, have two "people" inhabiting our bodies. No, I'm not suggesting that we suffer from multiple personality disorders. Rather, that we all struggle with conflicting approaches toward life that are as different from each other as sugar is from lemon.

The two mindsets to which I'm referring are those of the victim and the victor. They are almost exact opposites and will often make us appear to be two completely different people depending upon whatever life situation we encounter and which of the two approaches we adopt. If we adopt the mindset of the victor, we maintain our personal power and will remain faithful to our resolutions. If, however, we adopt the attitude of the victim, then we deplete our personal power and will eventually give up our resolutions.

How can we tell if we have given ourselves over to the victim instead of the victor? There are several characteristics that determine which of the two mindsets we have adopted in a specific circumstance. First, the victim is almost always passive while the victor will almost always be active. The victim will usually wait, hoping for an easy, effortless way out. He waits for rescue. He waits for some outside influence (often government or God) to "guide" him to a solution. He expects to achieve without having to do the thinking and work necessary to reach the achievement.

The victor, on the other hand, takes charge. He thinks, devises a solution or seeks positive alternatives for the situation in question and then acts according to what he thinks is the best choice. If the solution doesn't produce the expected results, the victor adjusts his thinking and experiments with new ideas. He continues to take action until the desired outcome is achieved or until all possible courses of action have been pursued to the best of his ability.

The victim is convinced that the Universe is ultimately hostile toward his intentions. To him life is "unfair" so he quits. Complaint is his one expertise. The most frequently asked question from the victim's lips is "What's the use?"

The victor sees the Universe as essentially benevolent. Though often life is unfair, this is not seen as a reason to give up. The victor expects that a well thought out plan of action will produce results that will be satisfactory or at least close to it. He does not see life as an enemy but rather a friend to be sought out and embraced. Thought and action are his key skills. The victor waits not for rescue. Having devised a plan he simply acts. Once the desired result is reached, he rests and enjoys the benefits of achievement.

Finally, the victim refuses to take responsibility. More energy is spent finding someone to blame than in solving the problem in the first place. "It's not my fault," is the victim's refrain. As the comedian Flip Wilson used to say, "The Devil made me do it." This is where the victim will ultimately retreat. He will always seek to shift the fault to someone other than himself. It's the fault of the cigarette companies that use nicotine in their cigarettes or it's the addictive nature of chocolate. It is never a choice for the victim.

The victor considers the act of blaming foolish and unproductive. If something doesn't go as anticipated, the first question of the victor is "How was I ineffective? How can I do things differently? How do I produce different results?" He assumes responsibility as a given. He realizes that all life's circumstances present us with choices and we are responsible for the choices we make. "Sure", says the victor, "cigarettes are addictive, but I can refuse to accept the addiction. I can fight it and win." The catch phrase of the victor is, "I can and I will." Upon reaching the desired achievement, he has no problem in proudly accepting the attendant reward.

How We Become and Remain Victims

So you made some significant New Year's resolutions on January 1. You attacked them with vigor and determination on January 2. Now it's March 1 and what you began with such vitality is now stuffed in the back seat with all the other resolutions abandoned over the years. When friends ask you about your commitment you sheepishly grin and say, "I don't think I'll ever make any more New Year's resolutions. How 'bout you?" Your friends grin and just as sheepishly agree with you. Then you both slink away in the uncomfortable silence that your admissions generate.

Ever experienced this or something close to it? It's a common phenomenon that has nailed just about every one of us at one time or another. In fact it is so common that many people refuse to even acknowledge making any New Year's resolutions because they "know" that they'll "just break them anyway, so why start?" Yet making New Year's resolutions is something most of us feel drawn to. After all the New Year holiday signifies a chance to start over, to achieve some of the dreams we hold dear. The clean slate found at the beginning of each New Year fills us with hope that this year things might be different. So why do we keep living the same experience over and over again. Why is it that we start with such good intentions and feel like such failures by the end of February or the beginning of March?

In our first issue I raised this question and talked about adopting the attitude of the victim rather than the victor. Adopting the attitude of the victim guarantees failure in achieving your resolutions. But nobody intentionally adopts the attitude of

the victim. Nobody starts out saying to themselves "I want to feel bad this year so I'm going to fail at keeping my resolutions." So how do we end up adopting the attitude of the victim and why do we remain there even when we know it isn't healthy for us?

Many psychologists give the following three reasons for not keeping New Year's resolutions. First there is the fact that often we choose resolutions that we really aren't interested in to begin with. We have no commitment to keep them because we really don't care about them. We often choose them because significant others in our lives want or expect us to commit to them. Consequently when it begins to cost us something to keep those resolutions we determine the price isn't worth it so we quit.

Secondly, there is the fear of failure. Often times we choose resolutions that overwhelm us. The job simply looks too big from where we currently stand. So rather than make an attempt and fail (thus looking foolish) we don't make the commitment at all. Many who refuse to make resolutions fall into this category. They just don't want to start and fail again. It is just too painful. So why start at all.

Thirdly, there is the fear of success. As strange as it seems, sometimes we just don't know what to do if we win. Achieving the resolution might put us in a place where we take on new and frightening responsibilities. It might cause others to become envious of us. Success might cause us to have to re-evaluate our current relationships and trim out some that hold us back. That could prove to be too painful to deal with so we quit.

Though all these ideas are valid and can explain why we refuse to continue pursuing the resolutions we made at the beginning of the year, they ignore a common fundamental idea that often pushes us into adopting the victim's attitude. The common seed in each of these explanations is the idea that pleasing others is more important than pleasing ourselves. In the first idea the person chooses resolutions he thinks others want him to choose, regardless of whether he wants to choose them. The second and third ideas cause the person to focus on "What does everybody think of me now?".

For most of our lives we have been taught that everyone else is important except us. We've been taught that our desires, dreams, goals and yes-meaningful resolutions are to be sacrificed to the whims of others or for the good of father, mother, spouse or state. In earliest childhood we are told that "Children are to be seen and not heard." so our parents can have a "moments peace". In adolescence we are drilled with the phrases "be responsible" and "grow up", meaning "fit in with the rest of the crowd and don't rock the boat". In our adulthood nothing brings shame faster than to have a significant someone inform us "You're so selfish!" From day one, we are constantly bombarded with the notion that our desires, goals, and dreams are somehow not worthy of pursuit. Only others are worthy of support. If we buy into this idea, and we often do unconsciously, then we become perpetual victims blown back and forth by the whims of others and lose all perspective of the value that our own desires and dreams contain.

To sacrifice our own dreams in order to pacify the fancies of another is the ultimate in self-destructive behavior. It damages our personal psyche and destroys any belief in our own value as human beings. Our ideas take a back seat over and over again until we reach the point where we no longer feel any confidence in any of our insights. One day we wake up to find that we have been completely diminished and our life has been wasted trying to satisfy others who we discover care little if anything about us. We in essence have become victims.

Often when we make this discovery we respond by doing the one thing that keeps us trapped as victims. We double or triple the energy with which we attempt to please others. We reason that if we can just get them to see all the energy we are putting into pleasing them then they will acknowledge our worth or begin to accept our dreams and ideas as valuable. But this succeeds in only perpetuating our victimization. Further, the more we attempt to please others the less trust we have in ourselves; the more diminished we become. In fact, many who are caught in the "pleasing others" loop begin to despise themselves on an unconscious level. This is because we realize that we are sacrificing our lives for an unworthy cause.

The real tragedy in all of this is that by sacrificing our lives to please others we fail to develop our true value as unique individuals. Each of us sees life from a unique perspective. Our thoughts, goals, dreams and deepest ideals are in many respects as unique as our fingerprints. Each of us, when we commit to pursue our deepest dreams and our highest goals will produce value that will contribute in unique and wonderful ways to the world around us. Let me say it more personally. When you commit to pursue your deepest dreams and your highest goals, you will produce value that will impact the world around you in unique and wonderful ways. Sacrificing your dreams and desires even in the pursuit of pleasing those around you deprives them of your true value as a human being.

So this leaves us with another question. How do we effectively stop living to please others and develop our own true value as human beings? How do we stop giving away our personal power? How do we start to use our personal power to begin to actually be the valuable person we are at our core? We will begin to discuss these questions in our next issue.

As you consider your New Year's resolutions, which attitude is predominant? The victim or the victor? The choice as to which attitude to adopt and to hold is up to you. Just as you can consistently choose the victim's attitude and give up, You can consistently choose the attitude of the victor and thus achieve your resolution.

Next I will be discussing how to maintain the attitude of the victor. First, however, we must examine exactly how we abandon the mindset of the victor over time and adopt the mindset of the victim as our predominant attitude in relation to resolutions we never seem to keep.

In the mean time you have the choice always available to you.

Victim or
Victor.
Which do You
Choose

