

'I'm full of resentment. And fear. And guilt.'

Are you? How did that happen?

I certainly know what this feels like. You feel like you're a bucket, and someone has poured something terrible inside you, and you are left with the consequences.

A more accurate assessment would be this: 'I have been concentrating on the ills of the past, the present, the future, others, and me, and I feel the natural and unavoidable consequences of this concentration on the negative'. It is rightly said that what we get out is a reflection of what we put in.

I cannot control what you do to me, but I am in charge of my reaction to it, at least past the initial, instinctual response. I cannot control the past, but I am in charge of whether or not I perceive myself as a victim of it, constantly replaying the tape, each time adding a tragic or dramatic flourish. I cannot control the future, but I am in charge of whether I quiver in anticipation or plan my contribution and choose to rely on God to guide my thoughts and actions and remove my fear. I cannot choose what trains come into the mental station, but I can choose which ones I get on.

Naturally, if we have spent years letting ourselves be dragged behind our minds like fallen riders with their feet trapped in the stirrups, regaining control of our thought lives (from which all else, our actions, and our emotions, flow) will take some work, and we will encounter numerous setbacks, small and large. The only way to retrain ourselves, however, is to start, and the only day to start is today.

Essentially, this is the practice of Step Ten:

'Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. ... Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our code.'

(Alcoholics Anonymous, 84:2)

The task, therefore, is to watch for these negative mental manifestations (and I would add fruitless fantasy and nostalgia to the list, equally harmful as they can be) and deliberately turn in one of two directions when they crop up:

- (1) Think about where I am now and what I am doing now.
- (2) Think about God.

The former is straightforward. If I have taken a strong Step Eleven that morning, I will have a plan for the day, and, at any particular point during the day, there will be something I am supposed to be doing and some activity I am supposed to be concentrating on.

The latter may be harder. The best approach is to take some spiritual reading and select a passage that appeals and concentrate on that. This might involve repetition of a prayer, concentrating on an idea about God or a spiritual principle and how it applies to our situation, or simple recitation, to block out the negative thinking and replace it with something better. At the very worst we are sparing ourselves a few minutes of further thrashing around inside our mental quicksand. At the very best, we will be lifted clean out of the morass.

Applied diligently, this will change your life.

There is no need to be a victim of the egoic mind forever. There is a solution, and that solution starts now.