

# Responsibility - The Ability to Respond

Is it possible to take responsibility for one's anger? What does it really mean to be responsible?

## Responsibility - The Ability to Respond

Responsibility is response-ability, the ability to respond to someone else's needs. When you respond to the other in you, that's responsibility.

I have experienced an incident of emotional trauma. I had hoped to overcome the behavior pattern that emanated from this incident, but was unsuccessful for a long time. I knew that eliminating one value from a complex emotion or state of being creates the illusion that the situation has disappeared; however, it will be re-awakened if some related parts remain untreated. When the latter get activated, they re-create the earlier emotion that one has already gotten rid of. Thus the partial cleansing I was able to perform did not help. But let me tell you what happened, and the happy ending.

I had a neighbor nicknamed Garbage by his wife, who in turn lovingly referred to her as Slut. These are the names the neighborhood knew them by, since whenever together, that's what they called each other - especially at 2 a.m. at 400 decibels. They were loud, foul mouthed, and often one or the other took a short vacation in the local jail.

I was walking my dogs one day when Mr. Garbage stormed out of his house flinging a stick around his head and shouting war cries and that he was "going to kill these dogs." I stopped him by aiming my house keys into the small of his back. He lifted his hand, and I was waiting for him to bring it down on me. My adrenaline started rising: red alert! I was ready. He would bring his hand down and I would put him in hospital with some fancy Kung-Fu moves. He did not oblige, but instead only promised that he would bring a woman to break my head open and spill my brains all over the pavement. He called me a slut, a whore, garbage, filth, rubbish, junk, shit, dirt, and he promised he would "fuck me" and then called me some more names. To my great surprise, I reacted likewise: I sneered at him and shouted, "Illiterate, moron, offal, refuse, impotent," etc. - nothing original.

Clara from the right (in horror): "You? Are you trying to stoop to the level of that imbecile?"

Clara from the left: "Yes, yes! Tell him! Swear! Come on, come on! Come up with your worst words. You enjoy it! Experience it! It's fun. Look how mad he is, tease him!"

Clara from the right: "Please, don't dirty yourself with such a confrontation. It is degrading. Look, all the neighbors are watching you. What are you trying to provide them with? A show? And one like that? This is out of character for a spiritual person!!!"

Clara from the left: "Tease him! So what if the neighbors have a show? You don't really care what anybody thinks about you as long as it is the truth. Since you get excited by calling the moron names, this is in you, so face it, be with it, enjoy your dark side!"

I did. Pointing at my dogs, I told him that his reaction was obvious, for he had encountered real intelligence. His eyes spat insane hatred, and I never even knew why - I was just telling him the truth. When I got home, I was shaking all over, and for the first time in my life, I locked the door. After that incident, whenever I encountered Mr. Garbage in the neighborhood, all my muscles tensed, I felt my throat going dry, and I hated him. I wanted him beaten, killed, out of my life and out of my sight. All this time I was trying to become a better person, to be more compassionate, except it didn't work as far as Mr. Garbage was concerned. Every time I thought I had progressed in loving people more, I waited to see Mr. Garbage to see how I felt. Alas, every time my reaction was the same.

I took a workshop to overcome my fear of Mr. Garbage. The instructor acted out Mr. Garbage's psyche, telling me how miserable he was, that his life was a living hell, etc. Then I really felt compassion towards him and was very happy. I came home from the workshop smiling. By chance, I met Mr. Garbage in the parking lot. Immediately all my muscles

tensed and I was ready to kill him. I felt devastated: here I was with all this spiritual work, and all for naught - there was still this one person in the world I hated with all my heart. I prayed to be given a chance to heal.

A week later, a few days before YOM KIPUR (Day of Atonement for Jews), Mr. Garbage was waiting for me before my door. I tensed as usual and started planning which kick I would apply if he attacked. For the first time since he moved to the neighborhood, he said hello to me.

"I need your help, Clara," he said quietly.

For a moment I was shocked. I breathed a silent "thanks," for I felt my prayer had been heard.

I invited him inside. Lady, my elder dog, left the room not wanting to sit under the same roof with him. Daffy, however, wriggled her tail, all forgiveness. To make a long story short, he wanted me to help him write a letter, since indeed, he was not very literate. He asked me to write to the police that his wife had been embezzling money. He had proof that she had been doing so for a while and that she had burned down the office where she worked when her boss was about to find out. He told me that his life was a living hell. His wife burned his clothes and called the police almost every week with some complaint about him, etc. He remembered to mention that he hadn't been lily white either. I assured him, I knew.

I wrote the letter and talked to him for many hours. I told him he didn't have to live such a life, that he had a choice, that every person alive has a right to seek out quality of life. He left at four o'clock in the morning and kissed my forehead. At that moment, something happened: I was freed. I felt elated, happy, full of energy. I started running up and down the stairs unable to contain my happiness, laughing, happy, crying, and then laughing some more. I went to bed, but not being able to sleep, I imagined that I invited all the people I knew to a big hall and thanked each for what they had given me. There were people, animals, family, also some people who had died, and I thanked each and every one of them. Mr. Garbage was the star guest. I thanked him with such love that my tears started flowing again. Then suddenly the dark room where I was came alight, bathing me in the warmest glow.

The strangest part of the story is that the following day, when I spoke to a few of my friends, who of course were thanked in my imaginary hall the night before, they all told me they woke up around 5 o'clock in the morning with a warm feeling in their chests and they thought of me.

To this day I am grateful to Mr. Garbage. He was that trigger in my life that allowed me to clean up fear within myself by enabling me to relate to his "consciousness" instead of the coarse role with which he identified. And then I could respond to him. Although problems can be treated locally, a lasting solution needs to address the whole being and make him more connected to his spiritual source by enhancing his response-ability. Service can do that. By investing in someone, you widen your state of being and consequently, there is more of "All-That-Is" in you.

If you want to change conditions, this is possible by taking responsibility for yourself, your life, your anger. Taking responsibility - I mean it in the fullest sense of the word - means to respond, being able to respond, having the response-ability to All-That-Is. Thus what you can do to gain more tolerance is to see in everything and everyone All-That-Is, seeing others as part of the same totality of which you are part.

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