

## **Chapter 13**

### **Dealing with Negative People**

We all know them; they suck our energy, spoil for a fight constantly, argue about everything, complain incessantly, and are just generally miserable. They are negative people. I know just how hard life can be, and how hard it is to maintain a cheerful, positive disposition when everything is going badly.

#### **Misery Loves Company**

I have often been accused of being negative myself. Some times it has been justified, many other times people have jumped to the conclusion from a single word, based on my past emotional history. This is something I fight every day of my life. None of us are perfect, certainly not me, but I am trying very hard.

One of the hardest obstacles to overcome in dealing with your own negativity, is the negativity of others. It is far too easy, when things are not going well or when something is upsetting you, to fall into the trap which chronically negative people lay.

They say misery loves company, and how true that really is. You see, what negative people want is other people to feel as miserable as they do. These folks may not even realize it, but they are not seeking sympathy or someone with whom to share their feelings. They are actually trying to make us see and feel just how miserable they are, by bringing us into the situation.

I have had many encounters with such people at work and in my own family. They constantly complain about how they are treated by someone else and how unfair life is to them, while trying to draw us into feeling that the same is true for us. If they can get us upset as well, they can plant a seed of discontentment into our spirits, and drive a wedge between us and the person they are upset with. By doing this, they can get us on their side.

While all of this may seem like just an appeal for sympathy, it is really an attempt to recruit you to their side, and get you to take issue with the person or situation as well. A great many people may not even realize they are doing this, while others, especially in the work place, are insidiously working to get the help of others, in turning the tables in their favor.

## **The R.U.N. Principle**

We all know them, but what can we do about them? There is a three step process which I call the R.U.N. principle. While this acronym is not really drawn from Zen directly, the underlying principles are. R.U.N. stands for Recognize, Understand, Neutralize.

The first step is to RECOGNIZE them. As in any other healing process, the first step is to recognize there is a problem, right? Until you know your enemy, you are at his/her mercy completely.

Take a good hard look around your office, shop, job site or family gathering. You can spot these people relatively easily, they are the ones off whispering in the corner, the chatters at the water cooler who shut up as soon as someone approaches. They go well out of their way to NOT speak to certain people, and frequently avoid eye contact with others. They rarely have anything cheerful to say or make conversation at all, unless it is to complain about someone or something.

The next step, is to UNDERSTAND there may be a hidden agenda at work, one which involves drawing you and everyone else into it! These people do not understand that all the perceived negative people, situations, and circumstances which come their way are in direct response to the negativity they exude and perpetuate. They are the folks who are never happy until everyone around them is unhappy.

Ah ha! The light just came on, eh? Maybe it is your mother-in-law, your brother, your sister, grandfather or co-worker. Whoever it is, they just are never happy until everyone around them is complaining and grumbling about something too.

Being a lifelong Star Trek fan (by the way, I thoroughly dislike the term "Trekkie"), I can't help but equate these folks with the alien creature from the original series, which derived sustenance from the emotion of hate. In many ways, this is actually true for chronically negative people. They exist in a world of negative emotion and energy, and are powerless in the face of anyone or anything which is positive.

As others are drawn into and overwhelmed by the flow of negativity, their own strength seems to grow and become more formidable. You can actually feel the drain on your own strength and will, just being in contact with them. I know you have all experienced this phenomenon. How many times have you come home from work or a family gathering, to collapse on the sofa and groan in agony, "Mr. Johnson, Aunt Maxine or Cousin Jerry just drains the life out of me! Five minutes with him/her makes me feel like I've run a marathon! I'm just totally exhausted!"

In all fairness, not ALL chronically negative people do this on purpose, or even realize how they are acting. Sometimes it is just the simple fact that they have not matured spiritually enough to understand how their words, thoughts, and actions combine to direct their own lives. Neither do they realize the affect they have on those around them, nor on how those people react to them. They may just be mimicking their parents' attitudes and actions, believing them to be normal.

The third step is to NEUTRALIZE them. Ever hear the advice, "Kill them with kindness?" While the normal context of this is to return good for evil, it actually goes much deeper. I learned a very rudimentary lesson early in life. Crabby, mean people can't stand it if you treat them nicely. It makes them absolutely crazy when you don't return evil for evil.

In order to neutralize a negative, we must add what, an equal measure of positive, right? Of course, mental energy is no different than bringing anything else into balance. If something is too sweet, add something sour; too sour, add some sugar.

A positive mental attitude is essential when dealing with negative people. All too often, we allow ourselves to become either caught up in the negativity, or to respond negatively to it. The result of

this, is to draw more negativity to ourselves and force our physical and emotional selves further out of balance.

By returning positive, or simply ignoring the negative attitudes of those around us, we escape from the trap and remain physically and emotionally in balance. Try this the next time you are confronted by such a person. You will see the wind going right out of their sails. They will falter a bit, sputter for a while, then either walk away or simply stop talking.

**"A heavy snowfall disappears into the sea without a trace."**

**- Zen Maxim**

Another method is to send positive energy out to the negative person, in the form of thoughts of love, acceptance, peace, and good wishes during your daily meditations. I have seen this work on relationships within my own family, which were tied up in years of bitter turmoil, and seemed to be well beyond any hope of repair. One of the parties, concentrated on sending warm loving energy to the other, over a period of several months. The next time they ran into each other, the other party had completely changed her attitude. Like magic the rift between these two ladies had been repaired and they are back on good terms with one another.

## **A Personal Experience**

I used to work with a woman who was so negative it nearly destroyed me. We shared a supervisor even though we were in different departments. Each day began with her coming to my office for a prolonged gripe session about our boss.

She did her best to convince me he was as evil as the Anti-Christ, was out to get us all, and would stop at nothing in his quest for power. Since he and I did have a few problems it was easy to fall prey to her programming. She had me so depressed and despondent I just wanted to blow my brains out!

About this time, I received my first Zen book, as a gift from one of my Aikido students. I read it and was inspired to try to turn my life around. I found that with a rather easy plan and a great deal of mental discipline, I was able to disarm my co-worker and set myself on the track to a more positive life.

The plan itself was simple, yet inspired. Each morning as "Ms. Doom and Gloom" came into my office, I made it a point to be too busy to engage in a long conversation. I started with just acting busy, frequently picking up papers, and studying them as she talked. I

refused to participate in the conversation and just smiled occasionally and grunted.

Each day I got busier and more pre-occupied, so soon I was able to ignore her completely while seeming perfectly justified in doing so. After a week or so, the visits just stopped. The next step was much harder, as I had the huge task of reprogramming my mind to accept the reality that, things were not as bad as they seemed and that, I was the one who was in control of my life!

I realize this was an extreme situation which may have no semblance to anything you may be going through, but nevertheless illustrates the dangers exposure to negativity can bring to your life. Since I was able to turn my mental attitudes around, my job satisfaction increased dramatically, my salary likewise went up drastically, and I no longer brought my job and complaints about it home with me. I don't always have great days, but I rarely have bad ones. In my personal life, I've gone on to become an international figure in the martial arts and a published author, none of which could have happened, if I had not begun believing in myself.