

Dissolving What is Stuck

A great story about the power of water comes from a master of yoga, Yogi Bhanan, and which was “Peggyized” and passed on to me by my mentor and friend Peggy Dylan. Imagine your unconscious as a dirty pan of oil. Whenever you do any healing work, it is like pouring pure, clear water into the pan of oil. What happens when water and oil come together? Since oil and water do not mix, the oil will start coming to the surface. The oil represents all of your old emotions and agreements. So as the water of clarity pours in, the difficult emotions rise to the surface (and become conscious). Can you remain open to everything that arises so it can overflow and be released?

Whenever you create more flow around your stagnant structure, long-forgotten emotions begin to float into your conscious mind. Your initial reaction may be to resist these old emotions. This resistance arises because, early on, you learned to shut down the uncomfortable parts of your conscious mind. You might think, “If I pretend my closet is already clean, maybe no one will notice,” or “If I keep the door closed long enough, perhaps the gremlins and monsters will go away.”

You may believe that if you close your senses down, if you keep all the taps of your emotions closed, you will stay safe. But imagine living in a house where all the drains are clogged with old sludge and you refuse to turn on the water for fear of what might overflow. Soon not only do you have the backlog of sludge but also overflowing toilets and of piles of unwashed clothes.

This tactic of keeping your emotions dammed up may have once worked to some extent. As a child it may have allowed you to survive in overwhelming emotional situations. But as an adult closing down strengthens the rigid structures that limit you. The same responses that helped you survive the ups and downs of your childhood now keep you from being flexible and present as an adult.

For example, the thought “Mom loves my brother more than me” could become the belief that no one could ever really love you. Every time you are in a relationship and feel loved, that new energy would flow around your old “no one loves me” agreement. Getting the love you so desperately crave would be like pouring clear water into your being and stirring up all the mud of old emotions to the surface. Your fear of abandonment and loss might arise. Without awareness, you might unconsciously create a drama to explain your emotions, and then blame your partner for your uncomfortable feelings.

The pattern of closing becomes so habitual it is hard to recognize. With practice you can learn to notice when you are closing, before you start making up stories and intensifying the emotions.

Here is a good way to begin to sense the difference in your being between staying open or closing. Shut your eyes and feel in your body a time you took something very personally, a time when you felt offended or angry or resentful of someone else’s actions. It may be something that happened yesterday, or something that happened ten

years ago. Visualize something that was very painful at the time. How did your body feel? Take a moment to experience the emotions and sensations in your body while you imagine something that hurt you.

Most of us feel a constriction, a tightening in our body, when we take something personally. There is a feeling of becoming smaller, of closing in. The mind perceives we are being judged or wronged in some way, and our old thoughts trigger our emotional body.

Now feel a time you could have taken something personally, but did not—perhaps something in the past that would have hurt you, but this particular time did not. How did your body feel? How did this feel different from when you took something personally? Notice if any images or symbols arise to show the difference between these two states of being.

When you do not take an event or confrontation personally, there is a sense of fluidity in the body. You keep your happiness and balance because you are open. Instead of feeling the grip and weight of your structure, you feel the space of your true being.

When you open, you allow old emotions to flow through you on their way out, rather than stagnating. Resisting old emotions only keeps out authentic healing. A stream blocked by debris will become stagnant. Removing dead leaves and trash allows for cleansing flow. Open the faucets and let the plumbing in your house function as it is meant to.

Why Resistance Is Futile

Resisting, or wishing things were different, is a way you likely close around pain. Another way is to compare yourself with others. You cause most of your own suffering not because of the actual emotional pain, but because of your reaction to it.

As you release your need to control your emotions, you align with the natural flow of energy. When you do not resist your structure while simultaneously not believing in it, you reclaim strength from it.

Resistance stops the flow of energy. If the voice of the old structure is talking loudly, and your reaction is to try and fight it, the only thing that wins is the old structure, for it now has your undivided attention. Resistance is the opposite of opening. By staying aware, you can use your emotions as a way to uncover the underlying structure.

When I first starting working with don Miguel Ruiz and the Toltec community, my resistance was fierce. I prided myself on being tough and independent. The truth is, I was terrified of disapproval. I would often spend the first two days of a workshop struggling with enormous resistance to any new information. My structure was being threatened, and I felt like I was fighting with all my might to keep from drowning.

One of my big shifts happened when I stopped judging my own resistance and opened beyond what I knew. This happened gradually, culminating in an experience in Peru in the last 1990's. My dear friend and mentor Gini was determined to support me in moving beyond my self-importance and need for approval. She hatched a plan with don Miguel and asked me to not teach or talk to anyone for the first five days of the trip, and to focus on being in service to everyone on the journey.

Shifting from being a teacher to being in silence was okay at first. I practiced paying attention to everything around me, and being open. That lasted for about one day. Then my structure started to assert itself. By day two, I was starting to see that I had things I wanted to share. I was important. I had a right to teach. "Why is Gini doing this to me? She is obviously trying to control me." I bounced from self-criticism to severe judgment to terror to resistance to anger. I was not being valued! I was being ignored! I wanted to fight for my rights! I knew there was a lesson in there somewhere, but my own resistance stopped me from seeing what it was.

One morning Gini asked me to help her plan a ceremony with the group. Planning a ceremony is one of my favorite things to do, but at this moment I exploded angrily as if she had asked me to clean a hundred toilets. I think I cursed at Gini and ran out the door. I was furious. How dare she think she could make me be in silence for days on end and then ask me to create a ceremony! How dare she!

Looking back, my strong reaction now seems comical. But at the time, I was so pushed by my own need to be independent and important that I was blind. I knew that a spiritual person is not supposed to be in resistance, but there I was! I stormed out of the hotel and furiously walked into Machu Picchu. It was raining hard, but I decided to climb Waynu Picchu, a beautiful, sacred, and very steep mountain at the edge of the city.

My anger kept growing as I climbed the mountain. I could not decide if I should toss myself off the cliff for being such a miserable excuse of a spiritual being or go back and yell at Gini for mistreating me. The rain intensified and the stone steps became steeper and more slippery. I soon came to a point of choice. I knew I could hold onto my anger, or I could continue up the mountain. I did not have the energy to do both. As I took the next step, I opened to releasing my anger. I surrendered. I stopped resisting my own resistance, and watched the emotions and struggle wash away with the rain as I continued to climb.

What caused me to resist being in silence was what Gini calls "a perceived threat to your image." My image was telling me, "If you were really important and a good girl, you would be teaching instead of being quiet and serving. If you were really spiritual, you would be okay with being in service. If you were special, you would get the lesson."

My point of choice was simple: to remain closed or to open. By a gift of grace (and pure exhaustion), I chose to open and keep moving on my path and up the mountain. I saw there was nothing to defend or fight against. As I climbed Waynu Picchu, my heart

opened. I simply was. I did not need to be right. Everything melted. I stopped identifying with my old stories and let go of my need to be seen in any particular way.

When you fight against your stories, they gain energy. When I hear people say, "I am never, ever going to do that again!" it is fairly certain they will be doing just that in the near future! When you open and say, "Thank you, agreement, for the ways you have served me. I release you and choose to accept love," you take the power from the old structure and give it to the new.

When you open you become so much larger than your fears; they are like spider webs instead of barbed wire. But when you fight your own structure, you cut yourself on its sharp edges. As you surrender to the immense flow between the solidity of your structure you will soon tap into an ocean of new resources and options.