

Theory~ Sorry Seems To Be The Hardest Word

by Jamie Palmer

Why is it so hard for some people to say, "I'm sorry"? Only two little words and yet there are those who will draw their last breathe without ever having uttered them.

Like most of our troubles, we can blame some of this one on our childhood. From our earliest moments we were able to detect subtle changes in the emotions of our parents. Unable to understand language, we relied on our senses. If our parents were frustrated or mad, we experienced fear and became agitated. As we grew older, we developed ways of escaping these negative feelings. This was the start of a long and rocky relationship with avoidance behavior.

Because anger is often a precursor to danger, we humans come pre-wired with survival mechanisms that work to protect us from harm. This originates back to early mankind when the world was a much more threatening place. The ability to outrun a predator or face it and fight was crucial to survival in those days. Modern man still possesses the fight or flight reaction, but along with this adrenaline-infused response, we have also developed much more subtle ways of protecting ourselves. One such method is avoidance and it comes in many forms, from simply delaying in making a decision in hopes that someone else will make it for us, to outright lying or blaming others for one's part in a problem. It's the avoidance of responsibility that I am most interested in.

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Why can't we admit our mistakes and simply say, "I'm sorry"? What are we so afraid of? The thought of being vulnerable and admitting our errors paralyzes us. We're afraid that through our admissions, we will in some way lose our power, or be less well-regarded; afraid that our transgressions may be later used against us, cause an argument, or give others justification to punish us with their actions and their words. Through avoidance, however, we can protect ourselves from hurt, shame, guilt, and the consequences of our actions. But it's only a temporary fix. The problems don't go away. The consequences of a life of avoidance are in the relationships that are affected or even lost.

I think we should change our perception of apologies. After all, to admit one's mistakes and say, "I'm sorry", takes courage, confidence, and integrity. When you say, "I'm sorry," you are speaking from a place of strength and compassion. You regret your mistake, but you are at peace with the way you handled the situation.

It is, admittedly, harder for most people to say their sorry when the person wronged is the unforgiving type. Actually, in a weird sort of way, I enjoy apologizing to these sorts the best. They just can't seem to let it go. It's as though by admitting the mistake, you gave up your right to be treated humanely. But even though their words and actions can be hurtful, I ask myself "did I intentionally mess up?" If my answer is no, then I can forgive myself, learn from my mistake, apologize to the person I wronged, make amends the best

I can, and let it go. If they choose to use my mistake as a weapon against me, that is their problem (and then they owe me the apology). I never regret doing the right thing; in fact it makes me stronger.

Most of us just aren't the type that intentionally sets out to make a mistake. Mistakes just happen from time to time and are what makes us human. When we do mess up, we need to realize that it was just our turn; tomorrow, it will be someone else's.

Keep in mind that, for the more serious transgressions, a simple apology may not be enough to put everything right. But, the same rules apply. Admit your mistake, learn from it so it doesn't happen again, forgive yourself, turn your focus to those you've hurt, devote yourself to making amends, if possible. Finally, move beyond the issue a stronger, albeit more humbled person.

"To ere is human, to forgive, divine" (1711 by Alexander Pope). Thank you Alex, I couldn't have said it better myself.

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