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What are the health consequences of hate?

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Do you know someone who actively, openly and consciously hates another person? I don't mean someone who is angry with another but rapidly gets over it. I mean someone who nurtures a grudge against another for a real or imagined offense and who not only wishes harm or evil upon another but who seeks and welcomes the opportunity to harm that person. One of my favorite movies is *The Outlaw Josey Wales*. The movie accurately portrays the hatred which existed between the North and the South during and after the American Civil War.

In one poignant scene, it is said, "A man like Wales lives by the feud." "Feud" is a terrifying word. It means: "a prolonged and bitter quarrel or dispute." A feud is not possible, I think, without hatred. It is conscious, and it is emotionally sustained in the heart of one toward another. Our question is, "Who does hatred hurt?" Who does the feud harm?

Hatred can be personal; it can be organizational, or structural. It is possible to hate "Joe," or "John" or "Jim." It is also possible to be part of one group of people that loathes another group. Hatred can be because of some affiliation or characteristic. Typically, it is directed toward someone or some group which is different from the one who hates.

It is possible to hate another person or group of persons because of race, ethnicity, religion, choices, wealth or poverty,, smell, habits, nationality, language, occupation, political affiliation, hurt, injury, experience or hundreds of other reasons. But these are the perceived reasons for hatred. What are the roots of hatred?

Most often humans love what they know and fear what they don't know. Hatred is often grounded in fear which is just as often the result of the lack of knowledge or experience. I once wondered why two children feared dogs. One day, a dog barked and the children's mother jump as if she had been shot. I knew then that the children had learned their fear from their mother and that they had never had the opportunity to love a dog. Other children grew up with dogs and learned to trust and love them.

Often human beings imagine that they hate someone or something when in actuality they simply fear them. And, often their fear is based on ignorance. The solution is to face our fear and discover that what you are afraid of about another person is not real.

We often hate others for telling us the truth about ourselves which truth we do not want to hear and which we refuse to accept. I once heard a minister tell a story of anger and dislike on his part toward another. He concluded by saying, "Don't be surprised, you know how I am." That is magical confession. It is the presumption that because we admit to others our anger or hatred that somehow that makes amends when in reality the only thing which makes amends is being truly sorry for our feelings and asking the other person's forgiveness for our transgression.

Hatred also comes from ignorance, jealousy or envy, disappointment and differences. But whatever the cause, hatred does more harm to the person who hates than it does to one who is hated.

For where does hatred come? Most often it is learned. Racial hatred is taught from one generation to another. It is not taught in classes for in textbooks but in behavior and by example. It is taught by vocabulary. It learned by what we call people. And, it is taught by the exclusion of someone from our lives and/or company.

Conditioning can be seen in the animal world as well as in human experience. Normally, we think that dogs and cats hate each other but have you ever seen a dog and a cat that was raised together? I have. Early in our marriage, we had a Shetland Sheep dog who had puppies. We also had a Siamese kitten. We fear that the mother dog, in defense of her puppies would harm the kitten. Instead, the kitten nursed the mother dog and they lived their entire lives in perfect harmony.

What are the health consequences of hate? The major effect is stress which produces both physiological and psychological changes in the human mind and body. Stress can alter memory and immune functions, and stress can make a person more susceptible to disease. Stress can trigger the activation of a condition which lies dormant in the body. Stress can also affect the ability to control chronic conditions such as diabetes.

Years ago, I treated an elderly patient for a chronic condition and was unable to achieve the desired control. After trying many different treatments, I realized that this person was under tremendous emotional stress due to the behavior of another family member. Address that person, helping resolve the family member's problem made it possible to treat the elderly patient successfully. The source of her stress was not hate but love.

Because there are two people or groups of people involved in human hate – the hater and the hated -- is one person or group dependent upon the resolution of the hatred in the heart of another in order to prevent that hatred from harming their health and life? The answer is obviously, no. The hatred of one for another can only harm the one who is hated if he or she allows himself or herself to become a victim.

The most powerful response to being hated is to forgive the hater before the hater is sorry for hating. Hate is only sustained when it is responded to with hate. When Nelson Mandela found the men who had murdered Steve Biko in South Africa he asked Mrs. Biko to allow him to

forgive the perpetrators. His request was not because the miscreants deserved forgiveness nor because they had asked for forgiveness, but because President Mandela knew that the only way for hate to be destroyed was through forgiveness.

This does not argue that criminals, motivated by hate, should not face the legal consequences of their act, but it illustrates the power of forgiveness when it is not deserved and when it is not sought.

Often the deepest friendships are birthed of forgiveness by the hated of the hater before the hater admits his or her transgression and/or before he or she asks for forgiveness.

If you hate another, and if you want to stop hating, find out the root of your hatred. Find out what you fear in another or what you don't know about another. Often, we will discover that others are just as afraid and as ignorant as we are. When we reach out to another, we often find common ground and our or their hatred is replaced with affection and then with love.

If you are hated by another, don't return hate. Realize that haters are more to be pitied than hated. Risk reaching out to them. You will discover that they are experiencing as much harm from hating you as you are from hating them. If you can have compassion upon them in their dilemma, you may find that peace and harmony can result.

It is not easy to reach out to someone who hates you but if you have the strength and courage to do so, you may find a friend and you certainly will find peace whether or not the person stops hating.

Do you know someone who actively, openly and consciously hates another person? Are you that person? Are you the object of that person's hate? Either way, the solution is the same and the benefit of stopping the cycle of hatred is enormous.