

The Mindful Path - Emotional Baggage

Marilyn Halpern

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An older monk and a junior monk were traveling together. They came to a river with a strong current. As the monks were preparing to cross the river, they saw a young and beautiful woman also attempting to cross. The young woman asked if they could help her cross to the other side. The two monks glanced at one another because they had taken vows not to touch a woman. Then, without a word, the older monk picked up the woman, carried her across the river, placed her gently on the other side, and carried on his journey.

The younger monk couldn't believe what had just happened. After rejoining his companion, he was speechless, and an hour passed without a word between them. Two hours passed, then three, finally the younger monk could contain himself any longer, and blurted out "As monks, we are not permitted a woman, how could you then carry that woman across the river?" The senior monk looked at him and replied, "Brother, I set her down on the other side of the river hours ago, why are you still carrying her?"

This thought-provoking parable is about being in the present moment. What emotional baggage are we lugging around? What are we still carrying that holds us to past resentments, binds us to regrets or connects us to sadness and bitterness?

The light and warmth of summer provides the perfect time to begin unpacking our emotional baggage. Here are five ways to lighten the load of what may be weighing us down:

Confront emotional pain. Reflect on what is causing your feelings and if possible, write or journal about the experience.

Action. Identify if there is something that can be done to resolve the painful situation. Often times, people realize what they can do is seek professional counseling or therapy to process life events. Others find refuge and support in a spiritual community.

A little help from our friends. Surround yourself with positive, supportive people who support your growth and vitality.

Forgive yourself and forgive others.

Let it go. Literally, we can let go of the heaviness that may have been burdening us for years. Often this can cause a feeling of freedom and liberation. If we don't let things go, the past can occupy our present and taint our future.

I hope your summer provides an opportunity for renewal, restoration and leaving the baggage that no longer serves you. It's time to leave those unwanted emotional bags at the curb. Thich Nhat Hanh wisely said, "The best way to take care of the future is to take care of the present moment." Enjoy summer and pack light.

Marilyn Halpern is the founder and executive director of Aspen Care Services. This locally owned business provides medical power of attorney, care management and professional guardianship services in the Denver Metro area. For more information visit - www.aspencareservices.com or www.aginglifecare.org. Photo credit: Matthew Clements

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