

## **‘Respons-ability’ A Positive Life Change**

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Have you ever had the experience of being around someone who is always complaining? When I’m in the presence of such a chronic complainer, I tend to become frustrated and impatient. For me, complaining is like a huge “no” to possibility. It is dispiriting.

On a positive note, I have learned that underneath all of my own complaints there is something important to be learned in so far as my complaints seem to always point me toward my deep cares and commitments.

For example, if I complain to a friend that “The people I work with are always gossiping behind each other’s backs,” this reveals, among other things, that I care about and am deeply committed to open, honest communication. Our complaints, you see, while expressing what we won’t stand for, have a silver lining: they tell us what we most desire and where our commitments lie.

One way to create a more harmonious world, I believe, is to turn our complaints inside out so that they express what we stand for instead of what we oppose. In the above example this would mean that instead of complaining, I would speak forthrightly of my deep longing for and commitment to gossip-free communication. When we complain, negativity and deadness take root; when we express personal commitment, integrity and possibility are born in the world.

Complaining is also dispiriting because it often has blame embedded within it. I am learning that rather than complaining and then blaming someone else, I can, if I chose, take responsibility for what has happened or is happening. This means recognizing that, no matter what the issue may be, I did, in some sense, create it and for this reason, I also have the power to create a new outcome!

As a way of exploring this, take a situation in your life where you are complaining and blaming someone or something for a problem you are experiencing. Reflect on the situation with emphasis on how you are a victim and how the other person or thing is to blame for your misfortune.

Now, take the very same situation where you are blaming and, rather than pointing the blame away from yourself, take responsibility for what has happened to you. Specifically, consider the question, “How did I create this?” In other words, “How have my own actions or efforts become factors in causing this situation?”

Here is an example of what I mean: Imagine that you were in a car, stopped at a traffic light, obeying the law, and someone came up from behind and rear-ended you. Immediately you would blame the other person, right! That’s the blame game. But, this time, rather than blaming the other person, what if you were to ask, “How did I create this misfortune?” Asking this question would invite you to move beyond your conditioned responses. For example, in the case of being rear-ended, the very decision to drive a car puts you in a position where events like this have a certain probability of occurring.

Rather than wallowing in blame, we can choose to simply take responsibility for our life decisions and problems. This can be liberating because once we take response-ability we gain the ability to respond. In this vein, a final practice I am exploring is to assume, not just part of the responsibility for mishaps and misunderstandings in my life, but 100% of the responsibility! On the surface, this may seem like an outrageous notion, but try it out the next time you slip into blaming someone you love. That's right simply swallow your pride, stare down your ego, and say, "Yep, I messed up there." Then, breathe and watch how tension and self-righteousness can be transformed into a sense of ease and compassion for both yourself and the "other."