



Intentions

Sometimes all it takes is one unfortunate word, one misunderstood innocent gesture to shatter a relationship we thought was solid or for a trivial event to take an unexpected turn, leaving us hurt and inconsolable. But, are our actions, and by extension those of others, really directed by intentions?

A few months ago, I realized something that radically transformed my perspective on the world and on my relationships with others. I was talking with my mother with whom I have had a conflictual relationship since I was a teenager, a toxic relationship, made of blackmail, harassment and repeated humiliations. Despite my various therapies and the work I do on myself on a daily basis, each time I meet with her, I become again that angry teenager who takes everything the wrong way and gets irritated by each of her admonitions, negative comments about life and eternal complaints. My mother is one of those people who are always in pain, are never satisfied with anything, who project all the possible calamities upon themselves and anyone else and contemplate in a tragic way, like the victims they are, every little thing that happens to them. Her arguments, which often contain everything and its opposite in the same sentence, do not suffer any contradiction which she welcomes with contempt since she is the supreme truth bearer.

So, back to my story, on that day, my mother explained to me that, a few days earlier, she had one of her cousins on the phone who spent her entire conversation complaining, enumerating all of her pains and making a list of everything that was going wrong in her life. And then, out of the blue, my mother told me something that totally stunned me: she wondered how her cousin managed to live with such a catastrophic vision of the world and her life and that it must not be easy for her husband



to suffer all these complaints daily. The thing is that my mother, in a few sentences, by describing her cousin's behavior, had just described her own for the past decades and noticed no direct or distant link whatsoever with herself.

It was at that moment that I understood that, against what I had always thought, almost none of my mother's behaviors were conscious. Despite her actions' great toxicity, there was no real intention to harm, no intention at all as a matter of fact, only automatic reactions and reflex emotions anchored in her for so long that she no longer paid any attention to them. She had never observed her behaviors in the reflections of her internal mirror, had never questioned them. In none of her gestures, in none of her words, was there any intention, good or bad, just the expression, invisible to her own eyes, of her psychological distress and the physical pain that results from it, originating from her untranscended childhood traumas. Unable of overcoming them, she has tirelessly dwelled on them since she entered adult life, stucked in an unextinguishable resentment against her now past away mother.

This incredible discovery allowed me to realize that none of her repeated attacks and criticisms against me, this displayed and recurring contempt for who I am, were, in fact, not directed against me, but simply an erratic expression of her immeasurable inner suffering. Therefore, I was not the cause of the monumental failure that I saw in her eyes when she looked at me; it was, in fact, only her own judgment upon herself, her own failures which include my education, and life in general, nothing that had really to do with me. At that very moment, the anger and resentment that I felt as soon as we were together dissolved instantly. Since I was not the real object of her mistreatment, I was finally able to give all this harmfulness, this sorrow back to their rightful owner - my mother - freeing myself from a weight that had never been mine. And, for the very first time, I looked at my mother with compassionate eyes upon that suffering old lady who would probably never experience resilience. There was no longer any affect on my part, just kindness and detachment. The toxic bond was broken.

A few days later, life sometimes likes repetition because it is through repetition that our brain learns, I witnessed the physical and verbal assault of one of my friends by her neighbor whose recurring psychiatric problems lead her to think that my friend is practicing black magic rituals against her. The crises come and go and can be quite violent.

That day, therefore, I was coming back from my daily walk and, alerted by their cries, stopped near them. I heard my friend vainly engage in an argument to defend herself against her neighbor who was, this time, accusing her of stealing wood from her ; she was trying to explain to her that at the time of the day she was supposedly stealing her wood, she was in fact at work and thus could not be responsible for this imaginary theft. Obviously, her interlocutor, locked in her delirium, refused to believe her and kept looping on her accusations. Witnessing the sterility of the exchange, the tone of which was rising with every sentence and seeing my friend starting to emotionally break down in front of her interlocutor's deafness, I intervened, took her in my arms and helped her home, thus cutting short any pursuit of discussion. After giving her time to calm down, I explained to her that her neighbor's mental state did not allow her to hear her arguments and that any discussion was therefore futile. I also explained to her that none of her neighbor's alleged accusations were directed



against her, against who she was as a person, and that, she thus did not have to defend herself because they did not, in truth, concern her. They were simply mirroring her neighbor's mental health. The fact of returning this suffering to her rightful owner, of taking it out of my friend's chest, brought a hint of relief into her eyes. I explained to her that her neighbor's crises could be directed indifferently at any person living in her immediate vicinity but crystallized on the person who was paying attention to them; if she treated them with indifference, if she did not take them seriously and personally, these attacks would eventually cease because it takes two to argue...

In the same way, at the moment, my daughter, who has both feet firmly planted in teenagehood, starts yelling at me or crying each time I open my mouth to talk to her. Each of my word is systematically interpreted in a hurtful way against her, even if I am just telling her that her shoelace is undone. She projects imaginary intentions onto me and seeks her place in life between victim and rebel hood, a typical female teenager's mode of construction.

Indeed, at this age, there is a propension to fantasize about others, about actors or rockstars, and about boys in general, from which the groupie phenomenon emerges. Female teenagers project the qualities they like onto men they don't know and project positive intentions onto those they know and fancy - or hurtful ones when it comes to their parents. For instance, if a high school boy a girl fancies smiles and says hello to her, this attitude will be, in her mind, dissected and analyzed, with the very purpose to make it correspond to her desire: "If he said hello and smiled to me, then it means he likes me..." If the boy in question has the misfortune to initiate a harmless chat, it is not impossible that, in the next fifteen minutes, the young girl imagines herself already married to him and begins to test signatures with her new last name in her school diary.

If this extreme, and somewhat weirdly funny, attitude punctuates teenage girls' emotional roller coaster life, it is not far from the general way our brain, men's or women's, functions when reaching adulthood: it interprets and, often, overinterprets facts. Each of our actions and those of others is viewed through the prism of our vision of the world and system of beliefs, often greatly imbued with judgment. How we look at and judge ourselves is the starting point for how we look at and judge others, what we project onto them and their actions towards us.

If we are all human beings connected to one another, we often forget in the equation that the other is not, in fact, us: they do not have our experience, our personality, our beliefs system; they are human beings like us but with an inner world totally different from ours. Yet we interpret their reactions as if they were ours, often victimizing ourselves in the process.

By taking back our power and giving back to their rightful owners the pain and anger that don't belong to us, we can continue to walk through life with a heart and mind freed from others' emotions and burden. Indeed, helping others, supporting them, does not mean making their pain our own; when someone talks about their suffering it allows them to ease it, to place it on the ground in front of them but, in no case, does the other ask us to take possession of it as our own.

Often, I meet people who tell me that they are empaths and that it is thus difficult for them to be in the same room as suffering people because they experience their suffering in an unbearable way.



However, if these same people come across a person filled with joy, they will not pay attention to that joy in the same way, they will not make it their own as they would with misery. Indeed, in the presence of suffering, what they experience is not empathy but resonance, the distress of others resonates with their own, there is a recognition in others' suffering which leads us to want to make it ours to relieve them because we would like the other to do the same thing for us, to get rid of it for us. Unfortunately, we cannot heal a suffering that is not ours, we can alleviate it by listening, we can guide others towards their own internal healing kit but we cannot steal their suffering to heal it instead of them, however we care about them.

Let's give back intentions to those they belong to and understand that, for most of us, those intentions are only unconscious reactions, not directed actions. On our part, let's ensure that each of our actions is imbued with a conscious intention, preferably filled with love and kindness, even when it comes to saying no or setting a boundary, towards ourselves and towards others. If we succeed, our relationship to the world and others will be greatly more peaceful.