

YOUR PAST GREATLY INFLUENCES YOUR PRESENT

As a counselor for more than 40 years, I have been privileged to know the secrets of many hearts. I have spent countless hours listening to people opening up to me their most intimate secrets. Often they will tell me that they have never shared what they tell me with anyone else on the planet. I, of course, am made to feel very good in being so trusted. It is part of the high that counselors get in the course of their work.

What never ceases to amaze me, however, is how happenings in the past continue to impact on people without them understanding that it is so. Perhaps it is because years of conditioning by certain events that occurred in the past have obscured the root causes of their thinking and behavior.

For example, a woman is caught in an impossible marriage for years and years. There is no sign of progress, only continuing deterioration. The husband stubbornly holds to his destructive ways and refuses counseling. The woman is stuck in the situation. Unable to move, I search for reasons why she remains as if paralyzed and unwilling to do anything about it. Then she tells me that many years ago, her suffering mother who was also trapped in an impossible marriage, told her that when she marries, she is obligated to remain in her marriage come what may. I need to show her how these words of her mother have caused her paralysis. Watching her mother die a martyr's death and hearing her words echoing in her ears have caused her to remain immobile and repeat her mother's behavior.

Words spoken in the past and long forgotten, but still lingering in the unconscious continue to haunt us. One very successful woman still remembers the insensitive words of her uncle when she was nine. "Don't send her to school," he said, "because she will never amount to anything." His words cut into her heart like a knife. Her anger and her obsession with proving him wrong were a hidden motivation that pushed her to succeed.

We are complex human beings. There are countless dimensions to us. So many factors that are at play and that determine how we think and act. So much of what we are goes unnoticed by us even as it continues to impact on us.

We repeat behavior coming from our past without being aware about where it is coming from. We find it difficult, if we are not trained, to make connections between the past and how it has influenced the present. And we keep repeating old patterns without understanding them

I remember a talented young lady who hated her father, yet when she chose her boyfriend she was not aware that he was very much like her dad. When I made her aware of this she was amazed and eventually understood that the relationship would never work. Because she was able to make connections between her past and the present, she was able to avoid what would have been a sure disaster.