

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

July 18, 2011

The world is as you perceive it to be. I often get caught up in current affairs, whether it be prison politics, state supreme court scandals or the debt-limit controversy. Just like everyone else, I think my position is the right one and can't figure out why the people on the other side don't agree. Human nature, I guess.

I encounter all sorts of people in prison. Most are just average guys, neither exceptionally good nor bad. They made one or more bad choices that resulted in coming to prison. It's really not that easy to come to prison. Wisconsin has over 6 million people and only about 22,000 are in prison at any one time. Why it costs over \$1 billion a year to operate the DOC baffles me but since I don't have access to the expenditures I can't offer a reasonable critique.

Getting back to perception, each person has his or her own way of perceiving experiences. Some guys are obsessed with their past - what put them in prison - and it eats away at them causing severe depression. It's a shame that these guys are trapped in a moment of time which is over and done. They fail to realize that they are not what they did before. Each day, each of us can choose who we are going to be, what we will believe, what values we will hold and how we are going to act. A big part of this world view is the ability to forgive oneself for past acts. We may not have always lived up to our values. Even though we could have done better, that is no excuse to throw in the towel and give up.

I try to be disciplined in my dietary choices. Sometimes, I fall off the wagon and eat extra desserts or buy a box of Nutty Bars at canteen. This doesn't mean that I'm going to lose all control and start eating everything in sight. I acknowledge my lapse, reaffirm my commitment to a healthy lifestyle and move on. Sometimes I need to do a bit of exercise to offset the extra calories but my long-term goals are still there.

Many experiences in life are like this. Just because we did not live up to our own expectations does not mean we are bad people or should abandon all hope. Yet some people do. They ended up in prison for an horrendous crime that destroyed themselves as well as their victim.

July 18, 2011/page two

Forgiveness is the first step in healing. Even if a victim or victim's family will not forgive, it is still necessary to forgive oneself. Stop beating yourself up over where you went wrong. Acknowledge your error, forgive yourself, make amends and move on.

I prefer to see the world as a wonderful place full of love and happiness. I see endless opportunities for doing good and helping others. I try to see the best in everyone I meet. I can also see where people make choices to be less than their potential. Sometimes I try to offer advice but mostly I just say "he's doing the best he can with what he has to work with." We all are. The "best we can" is a combination of opportunities, motivation and ability. Sometimes we lack motivation to do better, other times opportunities are lacking. When I view people in this manner, I am less judgmental.

Being judgmental is my achilles heel. I find myself judging people based on what they say or what I see them do. I constantly have to remind myself to love everyone all the time, to let the Lord's love flow through my heart and into others. I know it is my ego wanting to judge others, not my Higher Self. Following a spiritual path and choosing to perceive the world on these terms means that I should not let myself get caught up in petty issues. I should focus on making the world a better place for everyone with whom I come in contact. And if I don't live up to my highest ideals today, I still have tomorrow to do better. The daily striving brings me closer to God every day and makes me a more loving, compassionate human being.

Bless you all.