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Six Steps to Neutralize the Spell of Your Negative Past

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Are you “spellbound” by your past? Here are three indicators that you are under the destructive spell of your negative past:

1. *Certain situations trigger extreme, out-of-control emotional reactions.* It feels as if you go on “auto-pilot” and have little or no control over the way you feel or behave once certain internal buttons have been pushed. For example, Marta trembles with fear at the thought of asserting herself with her boss, who overburdens Marta with an excessive workload. Joe goes into a rage when he believes he is being accused of making an error, however insignificant. Ben is consumed with jealousy when he catches his girlfriend smiling at a stranger.

2. *All of the logical solutions and practical approaches to changing your out-of-control reactions have failed.* Your head may say “this is ridiculous” but you can’t stop yourself from over-reacting with anger, sadness, fear, shame, guilt, or jealousy to a situation that just doesn’t warrant that kind of emotional energy.

3. *You keep making the same unhealthy choices over and over again.* Although you may vow that you are going to set a new course, your default mode is set on self-destruct. You can’t seem to keep yourself from repeating the same mistakes—even though you know better. Elizabeth continues to have relationships with married men, despite of years of heartache from other married lovers. Mark lies to his manager and coworkers, although that behavior led to Mark’s dismissal from his last two jobs.

What can you do if you are spellbound? Here are some steps you can take which will neutralize the damaging effect the past has on you:

1. *Reclaim your power by refusing to think of yourself as a victim.* This does not mean you deny the bad things that have happened to you. Rather, it means you embrace your wholeness rather than your brokenness. Everything you have lived has strengthened your psychological immune system. Recognize your capacity to thrive in spite of the hardships that have come your way, and watch your life begin to mirror your more empowered sense of Self.
2. *Retire your need to blame anyone—including your self—for your present unhappiness.* Blame only weighs you down with unnecessary baggage that inhibits you from moving forward. Release blame and feel yourself lighten up.
3. *Forgive yourself for your mistakes.* Everybody makes them—that’s how we learn. Stop berating yourself with your so-called failures, and use that extra energy to create the life you desire today.
4. *Make peace with your past.* If certain unpleasant memories still hold a high degree of emotional charge, let a qualified therapist assist you in healing those wounds to loosen the psychological hold those traumatic episodes have on you.
5. *Change the thoughts you entertain about yourself.* Monitor your mental landscape to avoid habitual, self-limiting ways of thinking. When you catch yourself engaging in old thought patterns like, “I don’t deserve to be happy” or “I’m not good enough,” deliberately choose new thoughts that feel better to you.
6. *Stop using your past as a point of comparison to your present and future.* No matter what you have lived before, today can be different. Instead of focusing on how your life *has* been, place your attention on how you *want* your life to be. Keep your eye on the road ahead rather than the one behind you, and watch your life take you to the places you have dreamed of going!

As you let go of your past, you free yourself to live the life you truly desire. Step into the Now, and discover the unlimited potential for joy that awaits you there.

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