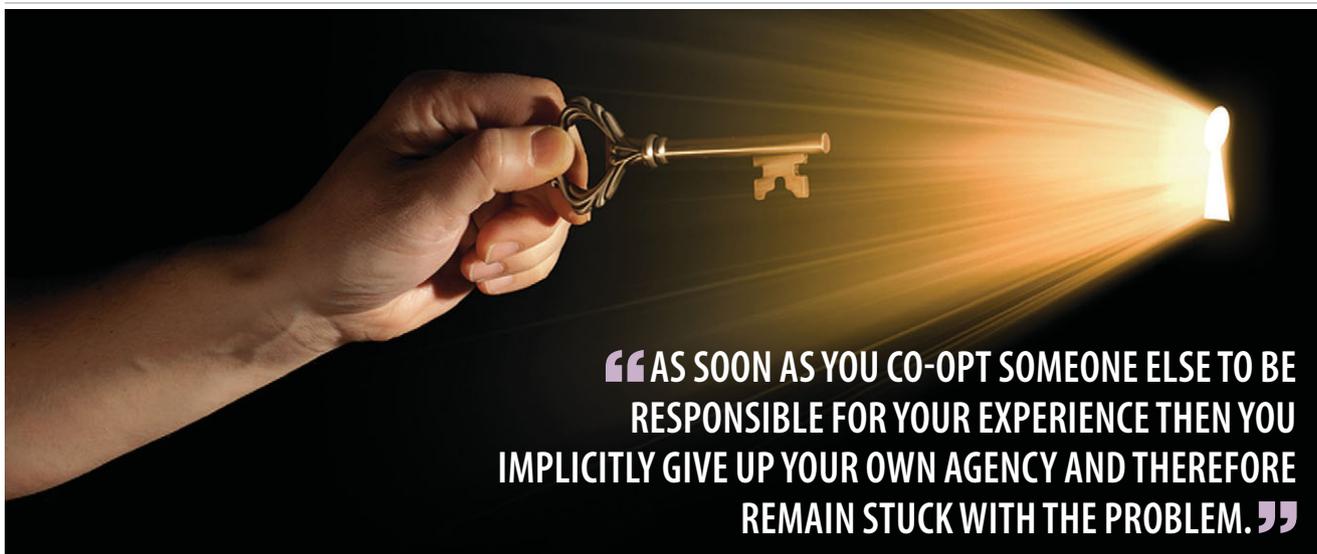




# THE ALCHEMIST

Turn your gripes into gold, your problems into purpose

BY LEONARD CARR



**“AS SOON AS YOU CO-OPT SOMEONE ELSE TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR EXPERIENCE THEN YOU IMPLICITLY GIVE UP YOUR OWN AGENCY AND THEREFORE REMAIN STUCK WITH THE PROBLEM.”**

WHenever you experience emotional discomfort or unhelpful mental preoccupations, you should ask yourself – as soon as you become aware of the problem – if it actually belongs to you, to another person, or may be even to Hashem. If it does not belong to you then you can immediately let it go. If it turns out to be your issue to resolve, then you need to engage with the problem in a proactive manner that will lead you on a path to shalom within yourself and the relationship in question.

Most people take a reactive approach to issues. This would mean focusing on, analysing and even becoming preoccupied either with the pain itself or with the source of the pain, or bypassing self-awareness and moving on to taking the actions necessary to get rid of the discomfort.

These behaviours take you further away from understanding your experience and render you powerless to change anything. Believing that you need the other person to fix your issue reinforces your sense of lacking and inadequacy. It is also obvious that

as soon as you co-opt someone else to be responsible for your experience then you implicitly give up your own agency and therefore remain stuck with the problem.

Furthermore, when you criticise, blame or complain, you are focusing on what you do not like or want with no insight for you or the other as to what you actually need in order to feel the way you would prefer in the circumstance. You also make the other person feel inadequate or defective, and they retaliate by either counter-accusing you or withdrawing from you.

The gift of the discomfort, however, is the message encrypted within it which is a message about what really matters to you. The biggest danger is focusing on others either by making them to blame for ‘causing’ your feelings, or making them responsible for taking your feelings away or changing your experience.

When you focus just on the discomfort or blame the source, you lose the opportunity to decipher the message and realign your approach or your circumstances in ways

that grow you and take you to new levels of maturity and wisdom.

The first step to appreciate hosting, therefore, is to bring your experience home. As soon as you own and contain the issue, you will feel emboldened and more whole.

A good way to reverse this habit and turn it to your advantage is to go through your litany of accusations towards the other person and then review it as a description of your behaviour, motives and intentions. You will then clearly see how what you are experiencing in the relationship is a mirror of you, and if you wish to change your experience, then you need to change your approach. When you change your approach then the other person will shift in their response to you.

Appreciatively problem-solving requires hosting your experience in order to make sense of it and deliberately choose your preferred reactions. Appreciative mindful deliberation involves opening your heart, centring your awareness and expanding your capacity to contain discomfort long

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enough to process it creatively and effectively. It allows you to go deeper into yourself and enlarge the breadth of your awareness and insight.

In order to do this, you need to learn to be inwardly supportive to yourself and hold firmly the belief in your capacity for healing. You also need to stay close to your knowledge of your ability to overcome challenges and maintain a sense of optimism that you will be able to create good out of this uncomfortable experience. When you are able to do this with challenging experiences, you increase your ability to transmute them into wisdom, resilience and ultimately, maturity.

You can start by tuning in to how the situation, circumstance or relationship is making you feel. What emotions are being evoked, what memories and associations. Then notice what you are telling yourself about the situation, the inner commentary that you are running in response to what you are experiencing. Notice how your commentary influences your feelings. Emotions are a language. You need to have vocabulary to identify the feeling and the fluency to articulate, first to yourself and then to another, the emotional narrative as it unfolds. Being aware of the emotional narrative allows you to identify your needs, preferences and expectations in any given moment. When you are fluent in your emotional expression, you can more effectively evoke an empathic attunement and understanding from others.

When you have revealed yourself in this way, the other person is able to accurately perceive and respond to your needs and feelings. In any given moment, try to identify at least four emotions. Notice emotions that seemingly contradict your dominant feelings, like affection in the midst of resentment or longing for connection in the midst of vengefulness. When your 'buttons are pressed', your instinctual reaction is being evoked, which puts you into a self-protective mode of flight, fight or shutdown. These instinctual reactions are not emotions; they are self-protective mechanisms. The threats that evoke them do not need to be real – they can be imagined. Whenever you react in ways or with intensity that is out of proportion to whatever evoked the

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reaction, it is because feelings from some past threatening experience are, through some association with that historical event, being brought into the present. This could be a tone of voice, a mode of speech, an action or smell like alcohol that you are reacting to; it is not what is happening in the moment, but the past situation that the present event is reminiscent of.

You may then start to attend to how your reaction to the situation affects your behaviour and how you show up in the relationship. Turn your attention to how the way that you respond affects the other participants in this interaction. When you put all of the elements described above together, you will then start to draw conclusions and make meaning for yourself out of your experience. Your conclusions will be most often about the others in the interaction, about yourself and about how the world works.

The next step is to consider how your conclusions, especially the ones that you habitually draw, affect your relationships with the other people.

Look at your negative reaction like sulking, withdrawing, being obstinate, switched off and get in touch with what you are using these strategies to protect yourself from. Then think about how you can use more effective and assertive ways to defend or protect yourself from what the other person in your mind is threatening.

Then move on to articulating of your preferences or aspirations. In other words, become clear about how you would prefer to be feeling in the situation or relationship. Many people know they do not want what they have got. They do not, however, know what they would prefer in place of their present circumstances. You cannot create what you can neither conceptualise nor imagine.

You can form your picture by first considering how you would prefer to be feeling in the circumstance or relationship. Then decide what values would need to be in place in order to foster such feelings. Examples would be compassion, forgiveness, kindness, playfulness or integrity. Be clear about what role you would need to play in creating your preferred experience. Decide what type of thinking would be more constructive to the thoughts that give rise to the problem. Consider more creative and positive attitudes to adopt. Think of what would need to change for your ideal scenario to become a reality.

### **ENVISION BEING PART OF THE SOLUTION**

You can help others to change their approach in managing the relationship by giving them more insight into your needs and what is truly important to you. You can also guide others as to what they would need to do differently in order to bring out the best in you.

### **CONJURE UP CREATIVE OPTIONS**

Explore what other options for participation you have that could bring meaningful change to the relationship or circumstance. An important rule is to always shift from describing the problem or complaining about it to applying your mind to creative solutions. Giving the benefit of the doubt is always a helpful starting point to breaking the cycle of criticism and blame. It's easier to change if you are told what someone wants than being told what they do not want when you have no idea what the alternative would be like.

Most importantly, any solution needs to assure those involved of the safeguarding of their well-being. ■