

ASK CONNIE—“Keeping Those Resolutions!”

Connie Myslik-McFadden

Dear Connie,

Each year for the past three years, I have made the same two New Year's resolutions but I can't keep them! The first is to be kinder to, and less critical of, my husband. The second is to avoid sugar. There are good reasons to keep both of these resolutions and I really do want to. Yet, my resolve doesn't last for more than two or three weeks. I end up feeling awful about myself because I don't have the willpower to do what I tell myself I want to do. Can you help?

Sincerely, —Tanya

Dear Tanya,

It's so human to look forward to the New Year with the hope and intention that we will (finally!) live up to our idealized self-image, that we will change longstanding negative habit patterns through willpower. And it's disappointing and frustrating to find ourselves dropping back into those patterns despite our best intentions—and so soon after the New Year has begun! Then, we go into self-judgment, followed by diminished self-esteem, followed by a sense of hopelessness about the possibility of ever changing... and often the patterns worsen. So why are New Year's resolutions hard for many, if not most, people to keep?

There are many reasons for this. I'd like to address what the Pathwork (www.Pathwork.org) considers the most important one. According to the Pathwork, we have two distinct energy currents that are related to our conscious and unconscious minds. Consciously, we may desire something and have a positive intention towards it, for example, being kinder to your husband. That would mean there is a “yes” current in your conscious mind. If there is also a “yes” current in your unconscious, you will be able to change your behavior towards your husband relatively effortlessly. However, if there is something going on outside of your awareness (by definition, if it's out of your awareness, it is unconscious) that says, “no” to being kinder to your husband, you will not be able to keep that resolution.



What is going on unconsciously is always more powerful than what you are aware of in your conscious mind. In this case, the “no” current is stronger.

With regard to sugar, your conscious mind says, “I won't eat sugar” (a “no” current), but in your unconscious, there is a “yes” to sugar that overwhelms your intention to avoid it. In the case of sugar, of course, there's a physical response to it that creates more craving—not just a “yes,” but a “YES, YES, MORE, MORE!”

There is nothing wrong with New Year's Resolutions per se. It's good to declare our intention to make changes and to visualize ourselves behaving differently. However, it's crucial to explore whatever resistance comes up, to understand why part of us might not want to keep a particular resolve. Is there a “no” current? If so, what is that all about? There are always reasons.

In the case of a relationship, there may be anger, resentment or hurt from past interactions. Negative beliefs and patterns from parental relationships may unconsciously have been brought into the marital relationship by either or both partners. There may

have been a breakdown in communication, resulting in a holding back of honest thoughts and feelings. There may be a lot that needs to be addressed in your marriage before you can feel genuinely kindhearted towards your husband.

With sugar, you are probably aware that there are emotional as well as physical reasons why people reach for it, even when they know there will be unwelcome consequences. There are many books, groups, etc. that can be helpful with this. The most important concept is that we need to get to know what's going on under the surface, in our unconscious, in order to make meaningful, lasting change in our lives.

We need to have our conscious and unconscious desires in alignment—two “yes” currents. New Year's Resolutions made with that kind of alignment, not just raw willpower, will have a much better chance of success. ■

Good luck, Tanya! —Connie



Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW, is a psychotherapist in Bozeman with 25 years of

experience working with individuals, couples and groups. She leads workshops, retreats and teaches Dream work and Pathwork. Connie devoted 9 years to Jungian analysis, training, and supervision, after graduating from the Bryn Mawr School of Social Work. She went on to graduate from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, and Society of Souls, a kabbalistic school of healing. She is the author of “Gathering the Soul, a True Story of Spiritual Healing.” Pathwork (Pathwork.org) and Imago Relationship Therapy (www.GettingTheLoveYouWant.org) are two easily accessible sources for the theories upon which much of this column is based.

Do you have a relationship question?

E-mail Connie at conniem@mcn.net, or call 406-582-7450 and ask!

E-mail sent to Connie is read only by Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW, and will be held in strictest confidence. No identities will be published. Disclaimer: The responses to questions in this column are for information only. Never disregard professional advice or delay seeking it because of anything you read here. Working with a skilled professional is highly recommended.

Copyright © 2010 Connie Myslik-McFadden. All rights reserved.