

*“If you don’t heal what hurt you,
You will bleed on people who didn’t cut you”*

Emotional Allergies and Triggers

(An Excerpt from *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Pete Scazzero, ch. 7)

We are familiar with physical allergies to certain foods or pollen, but less familiar with our emotional allergies. An emotional allergy is an intense reaction to something in the present that reminds us, consciously or unconsciously, of an event from our history.

Examples of emotional allergies might be the response I used to have when Geri wanted to go away for weekends with her girlfriends in the early years of our marriage. I would have an allergic reaction. It reminded me of early feelings of my parent’s emotional unavailability. The circumstances were very different, but the feeling was the same.

Another example is when Theresa sees her husband watching television instead of parenting the children with her and she gets very angry. She attacks and belittles him because he unconsciously reminds her of her father who left her home when she was seven years old, leaving her and her mom to fend for themselves.

As you can see, what happens most often in an allergic reaction is that we end up treating the person with whom we are in a relationship now as if they were someone from our past. We treat them like an It.

The PAIRS organization has developed a helpful exercise (“Healing the Ledger”) we encourage people to take part in, either with another person or by themselves:

- An emotional allergy you trigger in me is...
- When this allergy happens, what I think or tell myself is...
- When this allergy happens, I feel...
- When this allergy happens, what I think and feel about myself for even having these feelings is...
- When this happens inside me, the behaviour you then see from me is...
- What this allergy relates to in my history is...
- When this allergy happens, you remind me of...
- The price we are paying for this in our relationship is...
- The words from the past that I needed, the words that I wish had been said to me, are...

Many people realize through this exercise how much they still live in the past and project it into the present relationship. Once we begin to see this connection, we can begin making different choices that are more loving, emotionally adult responses rather than allergic reactions.