

Repeating Our Past

Therapy is important to help us recognise patterns and avoid making the same mistakes and engaging in the same destructive behaviour. Repeating the past and making the same mistakes is *repetition compulsion*, discussed by Sigmund Freud in his essay, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which demonstrated a radical change in Freud's earlier thinking and gives us a dramatic picture of human beings struggling with two opposing instincts or drives. In spiritual terms we could call this a battle between Good and Evil but in psychiatric terms means "*the blind impulse to repeat earlier experiences and situations quite irrespective of any advantage that doing so might bring from a pleasure-pain point of view.*" In simple terms it means that we are repeating the past, making the same mistakes, and constantly complaining about the results – and yet we keep doing it!

Repetition compulsion or repeating the past involves recreating the same dynamics that we experienced as children. If our childhood was filled with verbal abuse and fear, then we may be more comfortable living with abuse and fear as an adult – and so we pick a partner who calls us names or pushes us around.

We do not do this consciously and if we were the "good child" who didn't cause trouble and always helped out, we may be inclined to making people happy (the people pleaser). Again, we are repeating our past or making the same mistake.

If there was any kind of repetitive trauma in our past there is the sub-conscious dynamic of us wanting to re-experience that past and either affirm our choices at that time or try to achieve a different outcome in the present.

Repeating the past or repetition compulsion could involve picking friends who take advantage of us, or accepting jobs that don't offer a chance of promotion or professional development. Repeating the past is pursuing the same dead ends over and over again, or engaging in the same self-destructive behaviour.

To stop repeating the past, we must first come to accept that is what we are doing. Repeating the past is about making the same mistakes; however, it isn't about mistakes!

We consistently ignore the negative consequences of our actions. For example, if we are stressed about work we might always eat donuts, potato crisps, and chocolate bars until midnight – then wake up feeling disgustingly fat and sluggish. Yet, we ignore the awful feelings and not only do we keep on eating, we don't deal with the source of the stress. We are repeating the past and suffering for it. We are dealing with the stress by blocking or dulling our feelings of well being.

When we are trying to stop repeating the past, we may not know which way will work best until we try each method. We should pick the most obvious or easiest method to stop repeating the past, give it our best shot, and see what happens. If it doesn't work, then pick another path. A combination of things, such as books and new interests or a support group, are often effective ways to stop repeating the past. Basically, it is finding ways to do things differently, there may be no easy answers – but at least we become aware of our tendency towards repeating the past. If we do something nine times it becomes a habit!



"Sustainable Empowerment" is a new approach to psychotherapy and counselling developed by Richard Gosling that can help in building a stronger and more loving You.

Richard specialises in "Trauma Therapy" and "Crisis Counselling", is a member of the UK Association of Humanistic Psychology Practitioners and is offering his help and services in West London.

For more information on "Sustainable Empowerment" please visit www.sustainable-empowerment.co.uk or get in touch with Richard via the following email address: richard@sustainable-empowerment.co.uk