

From Routine to Habit

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When the topic "habit" or "habits" was given I immediately thought of about my mother. Mother used to say, "We're all people of habit." She often said, "Make it a habit to clean your room every day and it won't be so hard." Today it translates into the commonly used term, "creatures of habit" to describe certain human behaviors.

I tried to see where the latter, "creatures of habit," came from and found so many persons citing the quote that I gave up trying to locate its roots. Mother's idea was based on her wisdom, practice and common sense. For instance, Monday was "wash day." In the community, clothes would be hanging on clothes lines throughout. Saturday was bath day. Water was drawn from the well, heated on the stove, cooled down, poured into a large galvanized tub for Saturday's bath. In between, the dust from the fields was washed off using a "foot tub." Sunday was church day. Neighbors were seen walking on foot, and by horse-drawn buggies or wagons going to church.

The above descriptions were before washing machines, dryers, running water and automobiles that are now prominent in that same community. Were the above behavior routines that became habits? I still routinely bathe or shower, but daily instead of weekly. I go the church weekly and during the week and don't feel comfortable when I don't go to worship.

Speaking of wash days mentioned to above, I have never had a specific day to wash. I washed anytime because I had the capacity to do so. My routine was when my schedule permitted and I wanted to do so. I had no reason to form a habit to wash on Monday, or any other day.

In Windsor Gardens, wash day is assigned. I don't like it. Others say, "It will grow on me, meaning it will become a habit." To become a habit, there must be a "want to" as trigger, causing a routine that eventually turns into a habit. My problem is there is no "want to." Instead, it is a "have to." How long it will take to change from "have to" to "want to" is unknown, if ever. My wash day may become a necessary routine of "have to" that's tolerated, or an unrewarded habit. Habits are learned behaviors with some reward. My only reward is clean clothes, with a negative process.

In contrast, there's a very positive habit formed with great rewarding benefits. The routine of walking daily was practiced for a period of over a year. It developed with walking my dog, then going to the gym for exercise routines afterwards. I lost 10 pounds, from 184 lbs. to 172 lbs. and lowered my diabetes A-1c. I have "relapsed" in my daily walking routine to only three days a week, but the habit of walking and the reward remain a positive.

Habits can be positive or negative forces dependent upon the rewarding or non-rewarding results.