

# Hardness of Heart

By Anna Von Reitz



When I was young and reading The Holy Bible and other ancient scriptures for the first time, I kept running across this topic of "hardness of heart".

Being a child, I at first wondered if this was a literal disease like hardening of the arteries?

Not bad as a theory, but no, as my much-older Sister explained --- it was more like people put a shell, like a nut shell, around their hearts, so they couldn't feel things anymore.

Oh. Why would anyone do that?

To stop hurting and avoid caring. To avoid entanglements with others. To defend oneself from other people's opinions--- and needs. To find some little scrap of peace and certainty, even if it's a painfully limiting and costly certainty.

As I got older and I caught myself going through recurring waves of this "hardening of the heart" process, it was all too clear how and why we suffer from almost universal hardening of the heart.

Disappointments in love, ruined opportunities, betrayals by friends and co-workers, caustic embittered employers, whining critical people in general, bad karma, hairy moles, poverty or empty riches, sacred relationships turned into commercial accommodations, grinding necessities and obligations of various kinds ---it all adds up.

After a while you feel like you are treading water in a garbage pit, and get desperate to isolate yourself, so, you harden your heart.

I got so fed up with self-pitying "victims" at one point that I decided that they pitied themselves enough to make up for everyone else.

And a big "Bah, Humbug!" on that.

Life hadn't exactly been kind to me, either. So, I lost patience and hardened my heart some more.

I discovered that I could harden my heart right along with the best of the hard-hearted. It was easy. Just flip the bird and don't care.

I remembered my younger caring self, like an increasingly distant stranger, back when my heart wasn't hard.

For a period of about ten years, I didn't laugh, except for the inane tittering that hard-hearted people pass off as laughter.

When your heart is hard, you can't really feel laughter.

I made the obligatory donations to good causes and patted myself on the back for my generosity.

When your heart is hard, you can't really give anything, but you can go through the motions.

And because I was hard-hearted I attracted all kinds of other hard-hearted people into my life, and we would stand around at snobby dinner parties belly-bumping our hard shells together.

The truth is that it is a lot easier to be hard-hearted than it is to tear the wrapper off and put up with all the slings and arrows and rotten tomatoes.

Believe me. Been there. Done that.

At the end of the day, you can't live in the shelter of a hard heart. You can only freeze in place and wait for your own death.

So, one day, one of my co-workers made me laugh. I was helpless. Rolling on the floor. Breathless. And it felt so good....

I took a deep breath and felt my hardness of heart dissolving, like a dam giving way before the torrent of life in all its glory and sadness, and a voice in my ear said, "Darling, you have to accept all of it. Straight up. Can you do that?"

I thought about it for a moment.

Yes, I could. I was tough enough. I finally knew that.

So I let my full metal flak jacket slip away and I don't regret it. I am grateful to my co-worker to this day.

When you are reading about "hard heartedness" in the Bible, this is what God is talking about, this willful, self-protecting, self-absolving, self-centered existence without connection with or compassion for the rest of suffering Creation.

If you are going to live in this world -- as it is now -- you are going to suffer along with it. You are going to suffer fear and injustice. You are going to feel outrage and struggle with contempt. You will be pierced to the heart. You will wonder about your purpose and your sanity. You will know loneliness and every kind of want.

Yet, this is true also ---you will live life in each moment and experience it fully, and sooner or later, you will find courage and strength and abilities you never dreamed of, you'll find friends and mentors and cohorts, you will be aware of your breath and the fact that you are alive, and in time, you, too, will know the reasons.

Keep your heart open as a flower, in sunshine or rain, and life will begin to make sense to you. The ebb and flow of it, too, will come into view.

Keeping your heart open as a child's is the ultimate act of faith, a test that we all must pass through again and again, until sheer love overcomes and we are burned clean, left pure and at peace.

If you struggle with being hard-hearted, it can be reversed. It's just a choice, and you can choose other choices for yourself and your world. So, choose to feel and suffer and rise and be, live and laugh and lose along with the rest of us.

You will be in good company.

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