

The cylinder was placed horizontally to the ground and connected to a motor that rotated the cylinder like a clothes dryer. The cylinder had a flap that opened so that one could place objects inside. This opening could be latched shut so the object placed inside the cylinder would not fall out while rotating.

This elderly neighbor explained to me that those pretty smooth stones were simply ordinary rocks that had been polished in his tumbler. I am sure he recognized my skepticism, so he suggested we go outside and find some rocks together and put them inside the tumbler to prove to me that it actually worked the way he had explained.

We went outside and selected several ordinary looking rocks of different shapes, colors, and sizes. We placed them inside the tumbler and he turned it on. It did not spin very fast - it simply rotated around at about the same speed that a clothes dryer rotates. Those rocks we placed inside just tumbled all around on top of each other. After a few minutes, the neighbor showed me a few small chips of stone that had fallen out of the holes in the cylinder into a catch basin underneath the cylinder.

He explained to me that as the rocks hit each other when they tumbled inside the cylinder, the rough edges of one stone would chip off due to the impact that stone would have with the rough edge of another stone. He explained that through this process, all of the stones would have all of their rough edges knocked off. They would eventually become smooth and polished like the stones I admired in his collection.

He went on to explain that this process did not happen overnight and would take time. Over the next week or so, he invited me back to show me the progress as those

ordinary rocks I picked up in his yard became beautiful polished stones.

We each are like those rough and jagged rocks I picked up in my neighbor's yard as a young boy. God has placed us in this tumbler we call life, where we get knocked around by all of the other thick-headed numbskulls we come in contact with each day. We all are irritated by the stupid and hurtful acts of other people. Sometimes it seems that the greatest irritation comes from dealing with the imperfections of members of our own family. What's with this? Can't other people be less irritating?

Now, the big lesson of life: whenever someone else does something that annoys us, instead of focusing on how wrong the other person is, we should look inside ourselves to figure out why it bothers us so much. After all, there are many things that are not right in the world that do not disturb us. So why did this particular action, as wrong as it was, irritate us? That is the right question.

If we are honest with ourselves, usually we will recognize that the reason someone else's rough edge bothers us is because we have a rough edge of our own that conflicts with the other person's. We have little or no control over others, but we ultimately have control over ourselves.

Consequently, if we learn to identify why something bothers us, and then let it go, our rough edges will be chipped off. As life's hard knocks chip away our imperfections, we will find that not only are we less irritated by other people's imperfections, but we will be less irritating to others as well.

The key, then, is to be willing to let go of our imperfections instead of holding on to them. We go through life holding on to things. As a babe, we held on to our mother's blouse and our father's finger. As a child, we held