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Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



Independence July 2015

Only a few weeks ago we celebrated July 4, Independence Day, the Spirit of '76, honoring a people who freed themselves from the tyranny of power and control over their lives by a foreign country. America's great divide with Great Britain cracked open a transformational experience for our fledgling nation.

In the realm of human relationships, "Independence Day" involves a different kind of freedom – *emotional* freedom. Perhaps you are in a relationship in which you feel like a ghost – invisible or under the power and control of someone else. What signs inform you that you have stayed *overtime* in a situation that is weighing you down? And what beliefs or fears about relationships have blindsided you, causing you to ignore the internal messages that could lead to growth and change?

What are your beliefs about love relationships?

Perhaps you learned how to be an invisible "ghost" while growing up. If you internalized the lessons of emotional submissiveness and helplessness, then your emotional repertoire is going to have to expand. Relationships are full of hidden rules, but many of us don't realize when we embark on a relationship journey how many unspoken expectations lie buried in our family of origin. For example, "Be mine." What does that mean? Our myths about love relationships also come to us by way of stories and their unspoken messages, or from what we hear going on in the household, or from what we see on television about what we should look forward to in our adult lives. Romantic love is idealized in fairy tales, such as *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Beauty and the Beast*. They tell us that "Someday My Prince Will Come," and therefore we can expect to rescue or be rescued.

Non-violent communication expert, Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D., defines emotional slavery as believing ourselves responsible for the feelings of others, therefore compelled to do something about it. Continued enmeshment is the result. Your freedom closes down because you believe you have to take care of *me*. If your relationships feel like "emotional slavery," it's time to find a way out of that inner prison. The cost of assuming responsibility for the feelings of others is too high -- loss of self, swallowed-up, overwhelmed, smothered. It makes sense to uncover and move from whatever unconscious beliefs (abandonment, fear of losing the self) keep you from the intimacy and closeness you desire.

Adam

For Adam, 45, a successful businessman who had experienced one failed relationship after another, change began with the realization that *he* was the one guilty of exerting the power and control – and overdoing it. “I was like a boulder in the middle of a river,” he told me. “My heavy presence dammed the flow of love and support in my relationships. I was a prisoner of my own anger and the control I had been taught to exert over it.” His real failure had been not building a relationship with *himself* first. Instead, he sought out partners to fill him up, holding his own emotional cards close to his chest. “Never let anyone know what’s inside you,” he said. That was his survival strategy. Though Adam’s inner growth is still a work in progress, more and more he has been able to bypass the reflexive beliefs he’d spent his life developing and move from emotional slavery to emotional liberation and interdependency.

Just as Independence Day in this country represents the moment in time when our nation was ready to break free, so, too, there is a moment in time when we must identify and accept responsibility for our own feelings and needs, then take the necessary actions to do something about them. Then, we may celebrate our own hard-won *emotional* independence.

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