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Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



Americans Supporting Americans by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.



"All violence is the result of people tricking themselves into believing that their pain derives from other people and that consequently those people deserve to be punished."
— Marshall B. Rosenberg

President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, declaring that all enslaved persons in the Confederate States of America in rebellion and not in Union hands were freed.

On July 4, 2021, we celebrate 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. We continue to fight for our freedom and independence and honor those who put their lives on the line for us. It is really important that we recognize the strength and resilience of our communities when we support rather than oppress one another.



Also, we need to come to grips with our personal responsibility to honor the Self. Although legally freed, many people find themselves stuck in states of enslavement: Civil, Legal, Human, Religious, Emotional. The dynamics, beliefs and values in our family system gets perpetuated in multiple environments: home, school, marital, work, community, and government.

*"A person does not have to be behind bars to be a prisoner.
People can be prisoners of their own concepts and ideas. They can be slaves to their own selves."*
— Maharaji

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 enslaving you?

And what beliefs or fears about relationships have blindsided you, causing you to ignore the internal messages that could lead toward growth, empowerment, and change?

What about emotional slavery?

If you learned to be an invisible “ghost” while growing up or internalized your feelings into 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 travel along from 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 the “shoulds” we view on television. Also, romantic love is idealized in fairy tales, such as *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, that tell us that “Someday My Prince Will Come;” therefore, we learn to 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. This is a learned behavior and what we learn is to fix the unspoken needs of others. The result of this learned behavior is a developing need to please others, along with guilt and anxiety about not meeting that unconscious expectation. 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, emotional deadness. 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.

What about love relationships?

*“Growing up I felt a huge emptiness inside — like I’m a nobody screaming,
‘Somebody love me; somebody tell me who I am.’”*

— Isabel

Does this sound like you, or someone you know?

You are not alone. People who are immersed in their own emptiness, their own woundedness, often believe they can be healed by finding someone else. It doesn’t work!

You can move from emotional slavery (fear of losing the self) to emotional liberation and interdependency, and healthier relationships! Romantic love in a relationship starts to dwindle when one partner is viewed as emotionally dependent on the other. Perhaps you were raised to expect a partner to be on call, to rescue you, or to fill you up. This unconscious dependency makes one partner an emotional slave to the other. It creates a bottomless pit of emotional neediness and wears out loving feelings. Rather than enslavement, healthy, adult love relationships are interdependent, nourish the partner’s potential, speak one’s needs clearly and show empathy for the other. “I need to be considered. Do not discount me. What are your wants and what are your needs in a love relationship? I need to state what I want to eat, where I want to go, and if I want some space from you, and I need you to do the same with me. I need you to know what I am feeling without needing you to fix it, and I need to feel comfortable saying just that to you. I need to not lie down and play dead. I need a relationship that is reciprocally communicative without fear of losing you. I want and need that from you.”

Just as Independence Day represents the courageous move from dependency from Great Britain, when our nation was ready to break free, so, too, comes a 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 liberation and look forward to a relationship of reciprocity.

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