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Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



Independence — July 2019 by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

“In the truest sense, freedom cannot be bestowed; it must be won.”
— Franklin D. Roosevelt



Every year on the **4th of July**, Independence Day, Americans celebrate a transformational event that took place back on **July 4, 1776** when the 13 American colonies claimed their independence from England, thereby freeing themselves from the tyranny of power and control over their lives by another — in this case a foreign country. This great divide with Great Britain culminated in the formation of the United States of America.



A decade later a statue honoring this courageous creation of our fledging nation was built in Paris and shipped to the United States as a gift from France. Since then this statue, the Statue of Liberty, has stood in the New York Harbor as a welcoming symbol for immigrants who come to America seeking political and religious freedom and a new life. It is now one of the most famous statues (and inspiring ideas) in the world.

Personal Independence

In the realm of human relationships, “independence” involves a different kind of freedom – *emotional* freedom. In my practice I often treat people who are in relationships where one partner is either overly domineering or emotionally submissive to the other. This dynamic can wear out loving feelings and end up causing that love to

shrivel up and die. These unconscious *tyrannical/dependent* relationship styles can turn one partner into an emotional slave, feeling responsible for meeting the needs of the other.

Another kind of slavery!

“Emotional slavery is believing ourselves responsible for the feelings of others.”
— Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D., communications expert

Roots of Emotional “Slavery”

People who feel imprisoned by their own emptiness and *woundedness* may default to one pole of these relationship dynamics in the mistaken belief that it will fill them up and bring them happiness. It doesn't! If, for example, you have gravitated to an overly dependent pole in the relationship, you probably have learned to internalize your feelings for the sake of parental approval and you feel emotionally submissive and helpless (i.e., “invisible”). You may have become a bottomless pit of neediness. Recognize that both ends of the pole are needy, each using the other to get unconscious needs met. This style of interaction is a learned behavior probably learned while growing up in a family where that was the best way to survive. You adapted as best you could to the situation at hand for survival reasons.

But you no longer need to be in that childhood emotional situation. Therefore, your repertoire of emotional responses needs to expand in order for you to have a successful adult relationship. If you keep dragging your old relationship expectations and strategies along with you, it just won't work -- especially in love relationships. If what you think you know about love is based on your family of origin, or on stories you've read about, or movies you've seen, then you're in for a learning experience. Even worse, if you've picked up your ideas on love from 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*,” therefore we should expect to be rescued. Instead, it's only keeping you from the emotional intimacy and closeness you desire. So, it makes sense to move on and learn to rescue yourself!

On the flip side, many people feel that the path to happiness lies in rescuing others, becoming tangled up in their emotional issues and suffering. The cost of assuming responsibility for the feelings of others is high — loss of a sense of self, swallowed-up, overwhelmed, smothered, emotional deadness. But this is not hard-wired into us. This, too, is a learned behavior. We learned that we need to please others, and we learned to feel guilt and anxiety if we failed to meet the other person's expectations. So once again, it makes sense to get honest with yourself and see that your learned responses are preventing healthy love relationships. It's time to find a way out of that inner prison.

Independence is Worth the Fight for It!



need that from you.”

You deserve some good news! You can move from a position of emotional slavery to emotional liberation, to healthier relationships that bring you to a place of creative interdependence! Adult love relationships are interdependent, nourish the partner's potential, speak one's needs clearly, and show empathy for the other. What are your wants and needs in a love relationship? Be clear. “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 your 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

That kind of communication is freeing. It can turn a dependent relationship (as America's relationship with Great Britain once was) into one where both partners can thrive and evolve.

Schedule an appointment to work on your own struggles in individual, couples, or group therapy. Please call:
Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.; www.drgelt.com; 818.501.4123

Thank you for your support!

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