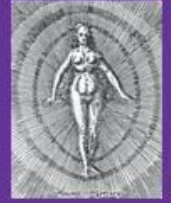


CHARLYNE GELT, PH.D.

Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



When the World Stirs Up Our Emotions by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

“People are disturbed not by things but by the view they take of them.”

Epictetus

World tension is high — over issues from terrorism to heated divisions among nations, groups, and families. Political tension is high, an “emotional rollercoaster” of a political campaign — and it is felt at home, at work, and clients bring that tension and anxiety in to session. Those who have grown up in chaotic-filled households experience these tensions at depth and bring their anxieties into the therapeutic setting.



External events can trigger hurtful memories of childhood wounds and dysfunctional family emotional environments — victim/victimizer scenarios, profound fears, narcissistic parental attitudes of entitlement that impact adult behavior over multi-generations including objectifying and emotionally abusing women. Female clients, even those who become successful, who learned to *endure an* abusive childhood — may be hurled to increased states of anxiety by the current political news events.

On the positive side, when the comfort zone gets stirred up by external social or political upheaval, it can be grist for the mill, and very useful in a therapeutic setting. A client’s sudden escalation into emotional crisis because of “outside” situations can be carefully and compassionately addressed in the safety of a therapy session. A client may believe he or she is “just upset about politics,” for example, or is reacting to some current personal event, but frequently it turns out to be a metaphor for “inside events,” or an unresolved *family of origin* issue.

That’s what happened to my client, Derrick, 45, a successful businessman, who entered therapy after his wife left him (the trigger event). But it turned out, there was more depth to the issue. It was his tornado, a wake-up call that revealed to him his chronic pattern of “bullying” for control which had caused him to lose one relationship after another. *He* was the one guilty of exerting 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 rigid control I had been taught to exert over it.” Derrick’s 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” was my motto,” he said. That was his survival strategy. Though Derrick’s inner growth is still a work in progress, more and more he’s been able to bypass the reactive beliefs he’d spent his life developing and move from emotional slavery to emotional liberation and interdependency. Being *left* was the trigger.

You cannot conquer what you cannot confront.

Using outside events or “breaking news” topics is a valuable tool, a *jumping off* point, that triggers a sudden willingness to explore previously unresolved “family of origin” issues.

External events can be catalysts for internal change. Viewing impulsive reactions in others, including authority figures, recreates earlier feelings of powerlessness. There is mental muscle in learning *why* a particular “outside” event resonates so strongly “inside.” Here lies another opportunity for personal growth, another opportunity to confront one’s *inner dragon*.

Knowing your stand on things you are less likely to be thrown off base by others. Liberation means you can listen, learn, and stay strong in your own beliefs, not be swayed by a manipulative trickster whether on the job, on TV, or at the dinner table. Does witnessing volatile disagreements on TV or among family and friends, shake you to the core? Are you unable to express yourself, or state your own personal views? Here lies an opportunity to become stronger at upholding your personal preferences and personal boundaries while simultaneously allowing others to freely express their own. In fact, a defining factor of what therapists call “*healthy narcissism*” is being open to an other’s perspective without losing your own.

In therapy, clients learn about their unconscious fears, about what triggers their anxiety, what keeps them feeling stuck and unable to express themselves — especially their personal views. They learn they no longer have to bite their tongues, keep silent, or muddle through life, victims of an *inner dragon*. Instead, they can stand their ground and dialogue with others, and hear the other person’s point of view — even when “hot thoughts” get triggered. What comes forth from your television set can actually spur you into unknown territory, challenge your unconscious family of origin beliefs, and expose the inherent strength, the “gold” hiding within!

The views you take of things, and of others, are vital to your sense of belonging, and determine whether you live a passionate life, or feel like a stranger in your own skin. What unconscious fears keep you feeling stuck, thinking you simply have to muddle through life? What is your inner dragon?

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