

The Uncomfortable Matter of Abuse

In our webinar of last week, July 26, 2014, we discussed dealing with trauma. While some traumas occur from external events over which we have little or no control, many of our traumas are the direct result of having experienced abuse at the hands of other people.

When I used to be a drug counselor, many of the people who were addicted to opiates had a history of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. As meditators, many of you also bear these wounds—and sometimes, these old wounds get in the way of your spiritual practice and your personal healing.

Take a deep breath. We're going to tell the truth about it, give you some tools to cope with it, and hopefully, you can begin to take your life back.

Dealing With Abusive People

By George A. Boyd © 1991

In situations where people abuse you by 1) violating you sexually, 2) harming you physically by overt violence, 3) attacking you emotionally and undermining your self esteem by cruel and heartless words, 4) paralyzing your will by placing you in a world of terror and guilt, or 5) freezing your spirit by making your every belief wrong, but those they judge to be correct and any independent thought, inspiration or revelation heretical, there is a common denominator: *By making you live in fear the violence or abuse may begin at any time, unexpectedly, without warning or even without provocation, abusive people are able to control you, to manipulate you, to bully you, and to take advantage of you.* Because they deny you any power or any rights, discount your feelings and disrespect your person, they force you into a victim role.



You get into a victim role because of fear. You continue in current abusive relationships or get into new abusive relationships because when you present yourself in the victim role, this type of people will prey on you, as they believe they can overpower you, intimidate you, and force you to do their will. They exert their power over you, because they can so frighten you into losing something you believe you cannot live without, and you come to see them as the sole provider of that need. They undermine your power and your faith by creating different kinds of fear that attacks these needs:

- Your need to survive and be physically safe is jeopardized when you are subjected to repeated violence or the threat of violence, and are made to fear you may be injured, maimed, or killed.
- Your need for financial security is undermined when you fear a person will withdraw their financial support or take away your job.
- Your need for love and belongingness is threatened when you fear a person will withdraw their affection and sexual favors.
- Your need for esteem is compromised when you fear you will lose a person's approval or respect.
- Your need for actualization is thwarted when you are not allowed to think for yourself, when you are not allowed to take charge of your own life, and you are not allowed to express your creativity and spirituality in ways that you see fit.

Abusive people try to make you afraid of them by other strategies, as well.

- **Emotional abuse**, which leaves no marks on your body, can be even more devastating than physical abuse. They may hurt you emotionally by cruel and unkind words, by withholding love, praise, or acknowledgement, by violating agreements such as having an affair in a relationship.

- **Sexual abuse** is one of the most shameful and humiliating ways that another person can mistreat you. By violating your sacred right to control your own body, they make you feel violated, defiled, used, and utterly disrespected. I believe that this type of abuse gives rise to greater rage on the part of the victim than any other type of abuse.
- **Abuse of your loved ones to get at you** is another devious way abusive people seek to work their will over you. Fear that someone will attack, injure or kill your children, your spouse or significant other, your parents or relatives, or a friend you care deeply about assaults your intimate network of support and love, evokes your immediate concern for their safety and well-being, and destroys your own peace of mind.
- **Abuse of your reputation** by circulating false information about you, or threatening to do so, is another way you can be struck at behind your back. By circulating rumors, by lying about you, by publishing untrue and misleading material about you, they can effectively damage your public and private reputation. Even though this is legally actionable, you will go through much heartache and misery before you get your day of retribution in court. Worse, blackmail, which seeks to expose the private parts of your life that you would rather not let the world know about, can threaten your employment, your relationship, or the goodwill others have for you.
- **Spiritual abuse** can make you afraid that another may use or invoke supernatural powers such as voodoo, magical spells or curses, or siddhis to attack you in your dreams, to drive you insane, to create misfortune for you in your everyday life or torment you in the world hereafter, through condemning you to transmigration or Eternal Hellfire. The fear of losing your salvation or being excommunicated from the Church are likewise used to frighten you into adopting accepted standards of behavior, belief or morality.

- **Existential abuse** is perhaps the most extreme form of spiritual abuse is where another creates in you, the fear of losing your Soul, your state of Grace, your very sense of self that differentiates you from the collective unconscious, so intensely that it drives you to the brink of psychosis. It tears into your most deeply held beliefs about yourself, about the universe, and about the nature of reality itself, such that you come to question everything you have ever learned or experienced. This method of so thoroughly breaking down the ego, its defenses and belief systems, is used in cultic groups to ostensibly create a spiritual breakthrough and a rebirth experience. Those for whom the rebirth experience is less than forthcoming are damaged for life, perhaps recovering from this ordeal only through extensive therapy and a good deal of support.
- **Social abuse** instills in you fear that you will be abandoned or isolated when you are in extremely vulnerable situations, such as when you are pregnant, are severely physically ill or in emotional crisis, are mobility-impaired such that you cannot provide for your own needs, or are in financial trouble.
- **Legal abuse** sets up the fear in you of losing your freedom through incarceration or jeopardizing your financial security through having to pay large fines. Abusive people sometimes litigate to intimidate you, or when you have done something illegal, use it as a means to blackmail you into getting what they want.
- **Addictive abuse** capitalizes on your fear of losing your source or supply of psychoactive chemicals, such as alcohol, tobacco, or licit and illicit drugs when you are addicted or dependent upon them to avoid withdrawal symptoms, psychological malaise, or overt physical or mental illness.

Anyone who uses means such as these to control or to intimidate you is attempting to meet their own needs or satisfy their own desires at your expense. If their will is powerful enough, their physical strength dominant enough, their authority convincing enough, their intimidation real enough, you can be trapped in relationship with these abusive people for a long time—living in fear, living in misery, living in secret pain. Later in this article, you will be shown what you can do to cope when you are unable presently to leave this situation, and finding ways to extricate yourself where it is possible to escape.

Victim's Viewpoint, Empowered Viewpoint

Often you remain victimized by these abusive individuals because you are unaware of your own power to make a difference: to change, stop, or to escape from the abuse you are experiencing. The empowered perspective lets you know that you are on equal footing with your tormentor, and that you are in touch with your own power, strength and resources. A bully remains a bully until he or she is challenged, confronted, or defeated. In the empowered perspective, you can confront the abusive person on his or her behavior, methods, or motives, communicate clearly that he or she is stepping across your acceptable boundaries, and let them know that this game... is over.

The empowered perspective begins with what you are telling yourself and what you believe. The victim perspective and empowered perspective are contrasted below.

VICTIM	EMPOWERED
I am trapped or powerless.	I have a choice. I can do something.
I cannot leave this person or situation or I will not survive. If I do survive I will suffer a severe loss of quality of life, or face a scary, uncertain future.	I can leave and survive on my own. I am willing to sacrifice my quality of life to be free from this abuse, and risk facing the uncertainties of change.

VICTIM	EMPOWERED
There is no way out. I don't know what to do.	I have options and alternatives. I have specific coping methods and techniques that I can bring to bear in this situation. There are ways to get what I want, to negotiate for terms more suitable to me, or to leave this situation.
I am paralyzed by fear.	I feel fear, but I am willing to take a calculated risk anyway. I am willing to move by faith that I can confront or escape this situation.
This situation will improve magically if given enough time, forgiveness and tolerance, and devotion.	This situation will improve if I change it, or convince the abuser to stop doing the behavior that is making me miserable. I can also leave the situation and not try to improve it.

What helps break up the victim's viewpoint is to understand and be aware that there is another position to relate to the situation in any given moment: the empowered viewpoint. One of the objectives of counseling and therapy is to reawaken and reeducate the client's empowered viewpoint. What empowers in these abusive situations is:

- (1) Strengthening your will and sense of self
- (2) The knowledge and belief that you have the right and "permission" to say no to any act or attempt to influence you with which do not feel comfortable
- (3) Your ability to set clear and firm limits in any situation that is compromising your needs or your rights as a human being
- (4) Being able to see the process (the larger picture of what is going on) and motivations in the situation, instead of being focused on the content (what is said or communicated to you nonverbally) and appearance (how you emotionally construe the behavior that is taking place)

- (5) Knowing specific cognitive, verbal and behavioral techniques to call forth when confronted by an abusive, intimidating or manipulative situation arises
- (6) Being able to act in faith, relying upon your self and having confidence in your Higher Power, so that when you take a risk, you will have a soft landing
- (7) Being able to creatively disarm or reframe the situation by not acting in expected or predictable ways that can be manipulated, controlled, or used as an excuse to escalate the situation by the abuser.

Spiritual Jujitsu

Many forms of martial arts are founded upon the idea that the attacker's own attack is thrown back upon him [the pronoun "him" or "he" will be used to refer to persons of either gender], or that the force expended upon you becomes the force by which the attacker is hurled to the other side of the mat. Dealing with an abusive person is an equally risky situation, and you must have a firm mastery of your spiritual jujitsu before taking him on in the ring of your living room, bedroom, or office. Some suggested initial jujitsu you may wish to apply to the abuser in your life include:

- Point out to the abuser what he is doing, and make him aware that he is trying to manipulate you and control you. Point out that he is trying to deny and excuse behavior, which is unacceptable and harmful to you.
- Let him know how his behavior impacts you: how it makes you feel (how it hurts, how it enrages you, how it makes you feel violated) and the consequences it has had in your life, affecting your health, your emotional state, your livelihood, your relationships, your legal status, and the way you feel about yourself (your self esteem). Let him know that this is not acceptable to you.

- Set definite and firm limits. Set time limits, giving a specific deadline for the abusive behavior to stop, or let him know you will apply very real measures available to you, legal and otherwise. Set space limits, by restricting certain areas where you will be afforded a place of sanctuary, a neutral zone—a private space where you will not be molested. Set emotional limits, citing certain attitudes or emotions that you will not tolerate being subjected to in your relationship. Set behavioral limits, letting him know that he must stop saying specific words and doing specific actions, as these are uncomfortable to you, cause you pain and misery, and they are not acceptable to you.
- In a situation where you cannot use self-defense methods, where there is a threat of violence or sexual misconduct, or these actions have been initiated, leave the situation physically by whatever means possible, and call for help. Follow up by placing a restraining order on him, having him arrested, and get yourself to a place where he cannot find you or your children.
- Where you feel confident enough in your own ability to defend yourself, use martial arts as allowed by law or required by the situation to disable your attacker to stop a physical or sexual assault on your person. You may also consider receiving a permit for and training in the use of mace (tear gas spray), tasers (hand-held electrical shock devices), or a firearm to defend yourself where the situation has escalated to the stage where your own survival truly is in jeopardy.
- Learn to defend yourself, using your voice and communication skills [More on this later].



- Meet your needs yourself without this person having to provide it for you. Gain independence of this person, by doing without things that he provides when necessary, by earning your own money, by being able to do tasks and chores that he has traditionally done, for yourself. Be flexible—realize that he is not the only game in town, and you can exploit other opportunities and meet other people to get your needs met.

Spiritual Jujitsu is all about you changing your attitude and perspective, from one of being a helpless victim trapped by this abusive person in a miserable and untenable situation, to one of being a human being with rights, dignity, honor, and yes—personal power—to change what you experience in your life.

Verbal Jujitsu

Verbal Jujitsu is really a collection of clever and powerful methods by which you take your abuser mentally off balance, and hurl him to the mat. They utilize communication skills, influencing your own subconscious mind to not accept abuse, and playfully disarming or dodging a situation that potentially could become quite dangerous.

Warning to Leave. Set a clear verbal limit that if a behavior continues you are going to leave. (For abuse to occur, you must be present for him to verbally or physically inflict his misery on you.) Then, get up and leave (and take your children—don't leave anyone to be a hostage). It helps to have somewhere to go: your parent's or a friend's house, a women's shelter, a motel, a trailer, or a cabin—set up these safe houses in advance. Alternately, simply drive away in your car. Get away and let him sober up, calm down, or come to his senses. If he is particularly unbalanced, you may wish to let him know by telephone that his behavior is unacceptable, and that this relationship is going to end imminently if he does not clean up his act now. Be prepared to back it up, too.

Labeling. Let the person know that that specific word or behavior is inappropriate and unacceptable to you. Point out to them what they are doing and let them know that you want them to stop it.

An Armor of Light. In this method, you construct an imaginary armor around yourself, a semi-permeable membrane that only allows good things to enter into your subconscious mind. To construct this armor, relax your body and place yourself in a light hypnotic state, and then visualize that any negative statement about you will not pass through this armor, and only positive, nurturing statements will be allowed to enter into your sensitive core of feelings. Give yourself the post-hypnotic suggestion that this armor will be able to be summoned by you instantly to guard you in any potentially abusive or negative situation.

Humorous Identification. Anything you can identify with through humor, no longer holds any power over you. Nothing diffuses an angry or tense situation faster than a good laugh.

The Vulcan Maneuver. You can sometimes disarm an emotional situation that appears like it may soon get out of control by using the Vulcan Maneuver, like Spock in Star Trek, by being perfectly logical. You may reason with your abuser, addressing him with logical statements only. “That does not make sense. Here are the facts. The conclusion you are making does not follow. You make this contention, but you have no proof.” It is sure to frustrate and may even confuse your potential abuser, as you have broken him out of his mental set. Similarly, you may deny emotional accusations in an unemotional way, for example, “your statements are incorrect.”



Deflection. In this technique, you deflect the abuser's criticisms and accusations by saying that you hear him and there may be a grain of truth in what he says. First, you reflect his statement, rephrasing what he has told you. For example, "you feel that I am totally incompetent." Then you fog, deferring the impact of the accusation by stating a generalized statement, "well, there is always some room for improvement in everyone." Using this technique, your abuser cannot reach you. The abuser may stop his game for a time, because he is not able to experience the satisfaction of getting to you, drawing out the rich blood of your emotional pain and suffering.

Getting It. Listen with attentiveness, and allow him to completely process his complaints and accusations about you. When he pauses, prompt him, "Is there anything else?" Continue to listen until he has uttered the last syllable of his tirade and convulsed out the final gesticulation of his tantrum. When you are certain he is done, say, "I got it. Thank you for sharing that." You may further assist him to process out these negative emotions (notice, you are not being the target here), by asking, "is there anything else upsetting you?" and listen with dispassion and detachment to his volcanic outbursts until he is again complete with his sharing. You complete the process by acknowledging him: "I got it. Thank you for sharing that with me."

Talking About Process and Motivation. Instead of focusing on the content of what he is saying, you can talk about the process of how he is saying it, for example, "When you say that, you sound like you are really angry with me," or "When you start drinking, it seems like you always try to find an excuse to pick a fight with me." Focusing on motivation is prompting him to look at what he is getting out of doing abusive behavior to you, and what he wants.

You might ask him, “What is it that makes you so angry?” or “When you see me crumpled on the floor, in obvious pain and crying, what do you get out of that?” At this level, you are really moving into counseling the abuser.

If he appears to benefit from exchanges of this type, by beginning to develop insight, and to actually change his abusive behavior, you may refer him to a professional counselor or therapist. It may not be best for you to try to do therapy on him, even if you are trained, because you may be too close to him for him to listen, and he may consider it a matter of pride or honor to have to “win” his arguments or be “right.”

Coping

It is not necessary for you to feel emotional hurt and be victimized by verbally abusive and manipulative people if you develop coping skills, like those discussed above.

Coping skills are what you use to deal with a situation, a person, or a person's words or actions to avoid feeling hurt, discounted, not valued or respected. The interpersonal methods discussed above are specific verbal and behavioral responses to let the abusive person know the impact of his behavior on you (how it makes you feel or the consequences on your life), what your limits and values are about these words and actions, and the consequences of continued practice of these abusive and unacceptable acts.

There is also the intrapersonal component of coping. This comprises what you say to yourself internally to modify, interpret and derive meaning from your experience. It is a fact of life that people do not have to like you, treat you fairly or with dignity, care about your feelings or even your survival, value or respect your person or your property.

It is also true that you have the choice to not get yourself into situations where you have to deal with people who will treat you this way. If you are already in a situation where you have to deal with these kinds of people, you have the choice to get out of it. In short, intrapersonal coping means that you do not have to make situations overwhelming, catastrophic, nightmarish, irreparable, by telling yourself that they are.

Rather, you can tell yourself that things are uncomfortable, but manageable; that they can be fixed or changed even if can't improve them right now. What it also implies is a shift from the "can't do" attitude to the "can do" attitude, the empowered viewpoint.

The empowered viewpoint begins when you are aware and realize that you do have a choice. You realize that you have the power to complete the cycle, to end the ongoing pattern: "I don't have to be with this person anymore," "I don't have to put up with this abusive behavior and vile speech anymore," "I don't have to be dependent on this person anymore," and "I don't have to be in this relationship anymore." When you can complete the abusive cycle, put an end to it, you can be free.

And freedom is a heck of a lot better than being stuck and miserable.





- As you scan your past with compassion and kindness, witness and acknowledge the different ways you have experienced abuse in your life
- Be willing to be healed of this pain, and allow Divine Love to enter into you and comfort you now
- Be willing to be strengthened, to move into a place of empowerment from feeling like a victim
- Be willing to be guided by wisdom to make the right choices to free yourself, if you are now in an abusive situation
- Be willing to make better choices for yourself in the future, so you will never go back to the prison of abuse again



Thank you for attending our webinar today!

