

# CHARLYNE GELT, PH.D.

Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



## COVID Burnout by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.



[\(The Great Realization\)](#)

*“The Only Way Out is Through”* — Robert Frost

As we begin to see light at the end of the Pandemic, we also see that families and communities around the world are burned out and still reeling from the effects of the Coronavirus. Our inner and outer lives have been turned topsy-turvy — huge economic crises, riots, revolts, political upheaval, and thousands of deaths. This may be the first time in history when the whole world has been experiencing the same thing and at the same time and having similar reactions. There’s no denying that the pandemic of 2020 has thrown us out of our comfort zone, changed our routines, and wreaked havoc with our emotions as so many of us experience waves of fear, hopelessness, despair, anxiety, anger, grief, loneliness, and uncertainty. These feelings are real, and our lack of control over them and over our circumstances has many of us feeling victimized.



### **The Opportunities in Crisis**

At this unprecedented time in our history many people are experiencing emotional distress, fear, and anxiety about the future. Still others, view this worldwide Pandemic as an opportunity for change, to be creative and be of

service to those in need. Certain suffering experiences like the Pandemic we cannot control. Other causes of suffering, including those that go on in our own families, can move us toward a journey of self-discovery and transformation. Although grief, loss, and suffering have been a universal experience from the beginning of time, COVID 19 has hit everyone at “home,” in our country and around the world as well as other kinds of suffering (war, poverty, abuse, brutality).

When we can view a difficult circumstance as a potential opening for problem-solving and change, we can dial down the stress and anxiety of situations we can't control. For many, the unexpected crisis of the coronavirus has also been a wake-up call forcing us to deal with neglected issues in our lives, spotlighting unanswered questions: "*What am I doing with my life?*" "*Am I attending to my dream?*" "*Is there unfinished business in my life?*" And, "*What about the larger issues, such as human rights, climate change, health?*"

### **Our ability to transform anything lies in our ability to reframe it.**

Different people have reacted in different ways to being blindsided by the pandemic — some by acting out; some by “soldiering on” and making the best of it; and some by retreating into denial. Denial, as every mental health professional well knows, doesn't work for long. What is often misunderstood about suffering is that it encompasses a paradox: Within the worst forms of suffering often lie hidden clues to a fuller life. By walking *through* our pain, allowing ourselves to feel it instead of side-stepping or running away from it, we open ourselves up to discovering the secret language which can lead to innumerable positive outcomes we never imagined possible.

### **Personal Suffering**

Suffering occurs on multiple levels: large scale (floods, wars, famine) and on a personal level. It may involve our work, our finances, our health, our families, or our personal relationships, such as marriage. A toxic relationship causes deep suffering and burn out. It can drain us of our aliveness and sense of *self*. For example, if a man suffers because his wife has left him and then he deals with it by numbing the pain with alcohol, he keeps himself stuck in a victim position. He is not suffering; he is avoiding the pain; he is not learning how he got there in the first place.

### **Invisible but Invaluable**

Anne, a 50-year-old housewife and mother, is another example of personal suffering. She was driven by her excessive *need to be needed*. The root of this behavior was grounded in her family of origin. While she made herself *invaluable* — she felt burned out and he also made herself invisible. What looked like a good thing, blocked her own growth. Remaining behind the scenes, she helped others grow, but was unaware of her own needs, including love and validation. (Psychologist Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D., points out other needs: such as respect, belonging, autonomy, and validation.)

To stop the burn out, to grow from her suffering, Anne had to face (not deny) the painful truth: Though she *believed* she was content to make other people look good, she wasn't. She literally made herself sick trying to please others. She experienced feelings of anxiety, impatience, and resentment. She was short-changing herself. Once she became willing to shift out of her comfort zone and experience the pain of all she had been missing in her marriage, she was able to consider creating change. “Up to a point, I was okay with a relationship that lacked communication and replicated the frustrations and hurts I'd witnessed in my family growing up. It was a real comfortable old shoe. But then one day I realized — *No, that's not comfortable at all. No more! No thank you. Not appreciated!* — With this in mind, I set out on a quest to learn everything I could about self-acceptance.”

### **The Only Way Out is Through**

Depth psychology tells us to open ourselves up to suffering, to *experience the “dark night of the soul,”* feel it, face it, and evolve from it. Dealing with suffering head-on can turn out to be a journey of self-discovery, of finding light within the darkness, which ultimately becomes a source of great richness, even transformation. An *inner* excursion into personal suffering may force us to face the consequences and restrictions of our own limiting belief systems and behaviors, and the steep price we've been paying for avoidance in terms of self-punishment (self-criticism, self-judgment, self-blame, and fear of risk-taking) to lost joy, creativity, happiness, and connection.

Generally, we are unaware of what we've been missing until grief and loss hits us like a hammer, then we clear away the boulders, the obstacles, and see what's around the bend.

Change and personal development involves suffering. To think otherwise is self-deception. Though we want change, our internalized beliefs and fears often prevent it, which causes anxiety. Growth, change, inner evolution generally means letting go of the familiar thinking, forming new habits, and a searching for new resources. Immobilized by fear and helplessness, results in resentment, frustration, emotional slavery, and personal stagnation.

*My life is dynamic because I welcome change. (Chopra)*

**Creating a Fresh Perspective.** We are all in a moment of **trauma and transition**. Use the opportunity of “down time” and technology to focus on personal health and self-reflection. It is a new path that reawakens hope and unleashes life energy previously trapped by anxiety, fear, and negativity. As we emerge from the dark night of COVID-19, view it as a time of renewal allowing you to know yourself more deeply.

**Create a Plan.** Rather than fighting against each other, let's fight *for* each other, acknowledge what is happening in the country and world-wide, learn from each other, and show empathy and compassion. We all have fears and we *can* turn them into challenges that create change. Create the plan that maximizes your best potential.

Thank you for your support!

Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

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