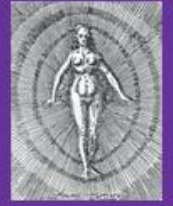


CHARLYNE GELT, PH.D.

Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



Reframing the Pandemic by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.
Abraham Lincoln



Communities around the world are 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.

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. It has been like a huge smack in the face.

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 (as we see on TV every day!); some by “soldiering on” and making the best of it; and some by retreating into denial (which can be dangerous). Denial, as every mental health professional well knows, doesn't work for long. The truth eventually bursts forth, often in an increase in physical symptoms, anger, suicidal ideation, and in our dreams.

Clues our Nightmares Give Us

“Psychologically, nightmares are viewed as the eruption of a fierce conflict between instinct and will within the individual's psyche.” — Moradi, R. M.D., *Pandemic: A Collective Nightmare or a Wake-Up Call?*

Dreams are the conscience of the soul. On both a personal and a collective level, what we push down and don't reckon with in our daily lives may emerge through the subconscious in disturbing dreams and terrifying nightmares. In times of uncertainty and conflict (such as now during the pandemic), dream images of intrusion, threat, falling, chase, death, and so many more, make their presence known — dreams such as these . . .

. . . *I'm in a huge house that is on fire. I can't get out. I am left with nothing. I am nothing . . .*

. . . *Something's wrong. I need to call 911 but can't remember the number . . .*

. . . *I'm with strangers sitting on a plane, flying low through the jungle, too close to the ground, were going to crash, I have to move my seat but can't . . .*

Dreams are meant to shed light on the unconscious, the unknown, the darkness. They inform us and can offer a deep wisdom within us that enables us to *access our creativity, redefine our goals and potential, and unlock blocks* so we can view personal issues from *another perspective*. Even in the most frightening nightmares there exists symbols that can boost our awareness — “healing images” that can move us from stress and distress.

The Opportunities in Crisis

As is often said, every crisis also presents us with an *opportunity*. 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?*”

How Can We Reframe Our Experience of the Pandemic?

This may be the first time in history when the whole world has been experiencing the same thing and the same time and having the same reactions. And even though there is no *one* way to deal with a world event as major as a pandemic, there are still some good general guidelines that can help us deal with turbulent times no matter where in the world we are?

- **Be realistic:** The best way to deal with something as disruptive and scary as a pandemic is to be *realistic* about it — not by avoiding it, denying it, or putting our heads in the sand. Face the facts and learn the rules and potential benefits. Our ability to transform anything lies in our ability to reframe it as an “opportunity” rather than a “disaster.”
- **This experience is temporary.** Since nothing lasts forever, the coronavirus won't either. Soon you'll be in a new season of life with new challenges to face — the so-called “new normal” that people keep talking about. We don't know yet what that will look like or when it will happen, but it will happen. Consider the possibility that it might even be better.
- **One Day at a Time. Along the way, some days are going to be rough. That's when the 12-step recovery groups' slogan “one day at a time” really helps.**
- **Study your dreams and nightmares.** Identify the imagery and the symbols in them because they are trying to tell you something. They are offering you information and guidance. Dreams, particularly nightmares, contain the “innate intelligence” you'll need in order to respond to the challenges you face daily. Discover the *generative possibilities* embedded in the difficulties of the nightmarish. The challenge is to tend these types of dream images in ways that open us to creativity rather than anxiety and agitation.
- **Focus of personal health and wellness:** So use the opportunity of free time and technology to get yourself in the best physical shape you can in order to fight the virus should you happen to run into it. Online yoga. Nutrition. Telehealth. Cooking classes on Zoom.

- **Self-isolation and self-reflection.** When we find ourselves in solitude a different kind of connection becomes available — an opportunity to rediscover something deep, meaningful, and essential within ourselves including a search for our authentic core, then the natural follow-up of finding the true self is reaching out to embrace community — a plan for when “the new normal.”

Creating a Fresh Perspective

We are all in a moment of **trauma and transition**. Just keep in mind that we are always in *a state of inner evolution*, versus being *a finished product*. We are never a finished product: “*How I am now is not how I can be in the future.*” We derive the best in ourselves and others with social awareness on personal, work, and relationship dimensions. Be authentic.

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.

Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

Resources

SmithsonianJourneys@mail.smithsonianjourneys.org; **Take a Virtual Tour of Paris *through the lens of the African American Experience*.** The influence of Black culture in Paris is one of the most prominent. Paris stood as the staging ground for the Harlem Renaissance, gave rise to jazz music in Europe, and welcomed African American artists, authors, and musicians as far back as the first Great War.



The Harlem Hellfighters

The soldiers of the famed 369th Infantry, New York National Guard, were disregarded based on their race and were sent to serve in France. Watch this History Channel video to learn how this all African American military regiment became one of the most decorated in the Great War.

Meet the Heroes

Video: Life of Privilege Explained in a \$100 Race — Please Watch to the End: [CLICK HERE](#)

Maya Angelou & Dave Chappelle — Courage/Angry, not bitter (“Iconoclasts” clip): [CLICK HERE](#)

Keeping You Current

Maya Angelou & Dave Chappelle — Courage/Angry, not bitter (“Iconoclasts” clip): [CLICK HERE](#)

Keeping You Current

Read J.K. Rowling’s New Children’s Book Online for Free. *The Ickabog* is separate from the *Harry Potter* series. (Debra Hurford Brown / J.K. Rowling). This new book “isn’t Harry Potter and it doesn’t include magic.” Instead, *The Ickabog* centers on King Fred the Fearless, who rules the mythical land of Cornucopia, and 5-year-old Bert Beamish. The tale also involves a monster: the titular Ickabog, who is rumored to devour children, according to [BBC News](#). The “Harry Potter” author is also asking young readers to submit illustrations of “The Ickabog”

Virtually stand on Endeavour's wings and explore the aft compartment through [Inside Endeavour Virtual Tour](#), created by photographer Jon Brack and narrated by Perry Roth-Johnson, PhD, Assistant Curator of Aerospace Science here at the California Science Center.



This virtual tour is part of our [Science Beyond the Center](#) educational series. Explore Science Center exhibits from behind the scenes, take in an amazing view, or learn something new from a scientist or astronaut. Come on in—the science is fine!



Giant Panda Cam

Take a virtual visit to the Smithsonian's National Zoo by tuning into our live webcams. Keep Tian Tian and Mei Xiang company from the comfort of your home.

[Check in on the Pandas](#)



Adopt a Coral Reef

... or a manatee, cactus, or kiwi! This list of animals and plants that are available for adoption around the world will inspire you to become a virtual parent to several exotic and endangered species.

[Adopt an Animal or Plant](#)



Twelve Books to Help Children
Understand Race, Anti-Racism and
Protest

