

Freedom from Within

Keynote Speech – Elana Leigh

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Welcome to you all, it is a privilege to be here now and also for the past months to have been so fully engaged in the topic of this conference.

I think gatherings like this are important places and times to reflect and recall those people whom we have learnt with and from who are no longer here with us. It is a time where we can give thanks for their lives and let their lives live on through our recollections of their gifts and who they were.

I also want to give thanks to all the organizers of this conference and congratulate SAATA on its international conference supported by the ITAA. Their journey is a manifestation of freedom from within.

To have this conference in India is an honor and a wonder as who knows better than the people of this country about what it means to fight for one's freedom to be who you are.

Please take a moment to reflect and give thanks to all these people as we appreciate and listen to the wisdom of one of the great teachers of this nation.

Two gentlemen are sitting on a park bench enjoying the afternoon sun. The one man is wearing a beautiful suit and a hat and the other rather worn clothes and sandals. After a while they realize they know each other but from another time in life. The man with the old worn clothes says " **you used to be my slave in the days when I was an aristocrat and we were the ruling party – you were a clever man then and it looks like you used your brains well**" The well dressed man smiled rather shyly and said " **yes I remember you well and you were a harsh man that often seemed to have no heart**" he paused and cautiously asked " **how is it for you to now be so rich when once upon a time you were a slave?**" The rich man gazed out to the sun and quietly answered " **I spent so many years dreaming of freedom, having money and being able to do whatever I chose to do and telling people what to do. If I am really**

honest with you I must tell you that I have never been unhappier. I worry so much about losing all that I have and I spend so much time managing my now complex life that there is little time to sit like I am now doing with you". He then returned the question to the poor man "and how is it for you now not having much compared to those days when our positions were reversed?" He replied with a lightness in his voice, a smile on his face and a glint in his eye. "I must say I have never been happier- I now have all the time to sit in the park, notice the seasons change, help someone cross the road if this is required but mostly I am no longer scared of losing what I have because I have all that I need and when I had all that wealth I really had nothing, but I only know this now as I have had time to sit and think and face that which I was to frightened to do"

I feel more free than I have ever felt before, I simply don't care as much as I used to, I am free to chose what I want and where I wish to be, I wish I was free, I feel so trapped, I cant wait till I don't have to work as hard, look after the children and my parents. I feel so free when I travel I can be who I want to be and not whom I think I should be.

These statements represent an aspiration and longing for the state called freedom. We human are driven to engage in many strange and extreme acts in order to taste this aphrodisiac state of freedom, which keeps us chasing rainbows.

Freedom from within is a desired state, that is so broadly advertised and revered and yet what is it? Do we understand what this commodity is and what we think and believe we are chasing?

The Dalai Lama states that "brute force, no matter how strongly applied can never subdue the basic desire for freedom and Rabindranath Tagore says the emancipation from the bondage of the soil is no freedom for the tree"

Here we see the paradox of freedom where on the one hand we long for freedom and on the other hand we desire and need strong bonds of attachment.

If one desires freedom I am assuming this is freedom from someone or something. There is a drive and desire to be freed from a limiting

influence in order for choice and liberation to be had. They are longing to move out of real or symbolic captivity into a world of freedom.

Berne spoke of this freedom when he stated that cure is achieved when we attain autonomy, which is when we overthrow the influence of all that is held in the parent and child ego states. In this state of autonomy we have choice to choose how we think and what we want as apposed to being dictated to and influenced.

Freedom is defined in the dictionary as an absence of undue restrictions and an opportunity to exercise one's rights and powers- to be whom we chose to be and to think what we chose to think.

So here we have many description and definitions of this state called freedom but still I am left pondering and wandering what makes the attainment of this so complex and rare?

When freedom is about breaking free from another then this is where we face our first dilemma in the journey of attaining it as before we can have this freedom we need to negotiate and tolerate a break and separation from another. This process of separating and individuating is complex and challenging and we all in our own ways know of so many stories where relationships broke down as the pain and complexity of separating could not be tolerated. In this process, we come face to face with emotions such as guilt, fear, anger and of course grief for the imagined or real loss of the relationship that we are now navigating to end as it was. What we often don't have at this stage is a trust in the other and ourselves that difference and separate minds can be tolerated and that the ending of this relationship as it is now known will perhaps be the beginning of something new with very different parameters and ways of relating.

In the process of navigating this separation complex feelings from both parties either maintain the old dynamic (where no change happens at all) or it creates a harsh cut that is perhaps easier to manage. If however these complexities are conscious to both parties and there is a capacity to navigate and negotiate through this process of separation, peaceful freedom and individuation is possible. Our question then is how?

Here we see three possible outcomes of the desire to separate. Firstly, where there is no change at all. Secondly, a flight into freedom where one looks and believes that one is free and separate but internally/psychologically nothing has shifted. The third is an authentic attainment of freedom from within and without where the original relationship has changed but continues to exist and function in a new way.

In relationships, both on a micro and macro level we are constantly negotiating issues of power and therefore power is what underpins all these relational dynamics. To attain authentic freedom, it is imperative to understand and know our own relationship to power.

Power is the ability to do or act- this therefore means we all have power but it is what we do with it that matters, and according to Plato this is the measure of man and I would add one of the passports to freedom.

As long as power is something that cannot be discussed and known it will remain disavowed and unconscious and we will continue to fall prey to the repetitive patterns of enactments where power is simply passed around like a hot potato, whilst no real and lasting change occurs. We unfortunately are surrounded with political examples of this power exchange and when the personal is political we see it in leaders as well as in ourselves.

There are those with power and those without or put in another way powerful and powerless people. What they share is fear-fear that is felt when required to shift from either position. To lose as well as to gain power can evoke and provoke strong feelings of fear for the real and imagined consequences of the change.

This fear has the capacity to immobilize us as we come to know what we know and even if we are uncomfortable in our well-worn positions it sometimes can feel more comfortable to stay with what we know rather than what we do not.

A client who has felt psychologically trapped most of his life recently said that the greatest challenge for him was to challenge his trapped feeling and begin to be more active in his life. He felt afraid of failing and thus having to face his real inner demons. It felt easier to dream of

freedom and choice than to take it. If he takes it he knows he has to take the consequences that come with it.

How many of us here in this room have felt fear when wanting to challenge our teachers, trainers and guru's? How many of us trainers have felt anger when our position of power was challenged? We here are certainly not exempt from unconsciously enacting our struggles with power from either position of holding or desiring power. The question is how do we talk about this and how do we as a collective support the opportunity to challenge and work with power in a way that is not shaming or naming but rather in a manner that facilitates freedom to find our way both inside and out. Freedom does not always have to be fought for- it can be relationally negotiated- this takes courage and true courage includes facing and knowing our fears.

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Having been raised in apartheid South Africa I learnt some of the harshest lessons in power abuse- I fled the country so as not to have to continue to live with that, which felt unbearable. In my fleeing I was able to hold onto a construction of myself as a good white that was simply a powerless child, unable to do anything about the political and social situation.

My deepest grief was and is that no matter what I do I can never eradicate the fact that I was a white in an apartheid country. My family and I consciously and/or unconsciously contributed and colluded with the system because whether we like it or not it suited us and that's what we knew.

I was a child and my torn loyalty and knowing that what was happening was wrong led me to flee.

I fled with pain vowing to find ways to make the world a better place and to never collude with such systems again-a somewhat romantic and childlike ideal, which is probably the place in myself that I unknowingly functioned from all these years. As long as I was operating and living from this childlike place in myself I could not grapple with the others aspects of my story- these being the persecutor, the colluder and the white privileged child. I was stuck in a melancholic grief, which meant that I longed for something I lost which was a childhood where justice, equality and dignity existed. I was frozen in time.

My fear of my unprocessed guilt prevented me from knowing my own power and what I was capable of doing with it. I could not relate to my own desire for power and that I too was able to injure others.

The reality was and is that these aspects were disavowed and yet I kept finding myself in situations where people were hurt, humiliated and injured by me and it was time for me to integrate these lost parts.

To know these darker parts of myself has allowed me freedom to apologize and to understand and know that we can unconsciously repeat history in complicated coded ways. In my attempt to DE identify with the persecutory position I became that.

I fled but was never free until such time that I could reincorporate lost aspects of myself and own both my powerless and powerful selves. To do this I needed to trust that I had enough resilience to address my fear and shame- to master these demons is again our passport to authentic freedom.

You may want for a moment to reflect with the person next to you some thoughts about your relationship with power and how you recently may have struggled with this?

Freedom from within is a state that is navigated and negotiated inside a safe well- contained relationship. What creates that safety is not only the outside aspects of the container but also and importantly who we are as the containers of the space. Questions we may pose to ourselves are: are we people that have faced our fears, know our demons and who work and understand our relationship with power and our capacity to injure? Do we understand how we are capable of injuring those who find their way to us to liberate themselves from the influences that hold them back from being themselves? In asking and grappling with questions like these we are admitting that power and fear exist in us all and when they are brought from the dark into the light they are less dangerous.

Nelson Mandela one of the great leaders of our time said that courage is not the absence of fear but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid but he who conquers that fear.

When we know, understand and master our fears, they stop being the central force that drives us to be everything other than who we are. We no longer need to be under the influence of a drive that needs to be satisfied through power plays and injustice. In a sense we have faced and survived the worst and are free from within to be who we are and to allow others to be who they are.

Being who we are, being free from within does not exclude making mistakes, feeling fear, not knowing, harming others, and many other such difficult and uncomfortable feelings and actions. It rather requires us to be humble to these realities, embrace them and know that we are human, we live collectively and that our responsibility is to live a conscious connected life with integrity and dignity. Freedom from within is not about independence and hedonism but in fact the very opposite which is about not fearing that living as a collective we lose ourselves.

Together we strong but in order to be together we need to be a collective of free selves who have faced their shadow and survived. This brings a cessation of the repetitive need to protect others and us from our worst imagined unacceptable fears. When we are so busy defending ourselves, we cannot be in real contact and without this contact it is easier to hurt one another.

I wonder what does fear mean to you?

Does it mean forgetting everything and running or does it mean facing everything and rising The choice is yours Miracles start to happen when you give as much energy to your dreams as you do to your fears.

Freedom from within cannot be granted by others nor can we grant it to others. What we can do is face our fears, work with our power or lack of it and in so doing be as free as we humanly can to make a difference in a world where so much difference needs to be made.

When you next find yourself sitting opposite someone who seeks your counsel- sit quietly with yourself and be willing to notice all those moments that you want to instruct the way they should be- stop and ask yourself what do you fear if you had no answer or nothing to say? When you have answered this you too may come to know that so much of what we do for others is not for them at all but to save ourselves from ourselves- this I believe is one of the great frailties of our humanity and

is alive in our profession. We transactional analysts need to trust that when we have turned the mirror inward and done our work that is the greatest gift we can have to offer.

I would like to conclude by sharing some of the wisdom from some of great leaders who have in their own ways faced their fear, their powerlessness and power and in that have offered us lessons to guide us through our darkness hopefully to a lighter place. I invite you to sit quietly with your reflections as you watch and listen. Thank You.

(A Slide show words by Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Rabindranath Tagore was played)