

*Names are changed to honor client confidentiality.*

## Free Your Spirit

Far from being free, Joe lives in the prison called “settling for.” Consequently, he lives a boring, soul-deadening existence. Long ago he deserted himself when he aborted his desires and dreams. Now Joe isn’t where he wants to be, doing what he wants to do. Not surprisingly, in the process of sacrificing his will, Joe lost any zest for life. Today, he’s hollow inside, a mere shell. He’s resigned to living a life that in no way resembles his true self.

Abandoned ambition and desire—the fire within—is a recipe for depression. It is a recipe that needs to be replaced by one that fulfills us at our very core. Unfortunately, the more Joe stifles himself, the more depressed he gets. He drinks to quiet the sadness and the longing in his heart. The longing is the voice of his soul pleading, “Come out! Let’s be alive!”

I believe the drawing power of the well-acclaimed movie *Titanic* is due to a theme we can all relate to. The movie reflects the striving of the human spirit to overcome bondage, both external and internal. Rose, a main character in the film, continuously encounters her constraints born out of her confining upbringing. She succeeds in overcoming them one by one.

Likewise, Jack triumphs over his limitations by pursuing interests and desires that extend beyond his own class status. The movie demonstrates the striving for and attainment of personal liberation.

We’re hard-wired to seek freedom, according to Muriel James. In her book, [\*Perspectives in Transactional Analysis\*](#), she writes: “The urge to be free is closely related to the urge to live. Freedom is the first struggle for life. It starts in the process of birth and the gasping for breath and continues to death... Because of this basic urge, people sense a welling up of desire to break out of confining situations—clothes that are too tight, playpens that are too small, jobs and schools and jails and cultures and personal relationships that are overly restrictive. ‘I want my freedom’ is a personal, individual desire and a universal shout.”

A major component of emotional well-being is autonomy, research shows. Autonomy means being our own person while taking control over our own lives. As autonomous people, we exercise our freedom to make choices and to design our lives according to what fulfills us. Instead of being slaves to the will and wishes of others, we honor the integrity of our will, choosing our own course of action.

In her book, James points out that autonomous people “do not have to be enslaved by their past. They can decide who to be and who not to be, what to do and what not to do, how to feel

and how not to feel...they can transcend past influences, plan creatively for the future, and learn to respond in freedom to the here and now of daily existence."

Deepak Chopra, the noted Indian doctor and writer, says: "Be true, and freedom will be given to you as a gift."

A sagging spirit or depression, like all discomfort, can be a signal alerting us that change is necessary. We all know the annoyance of walking around with a bothersome pebble in our shoe. It isn't long before the unrelenting irritation forces us to remove it.

Psychological discomfort is no different—we are compelled to free ourselves. Unhappiness is often the result of a suppressed existence, a life that's stalled because a diminished self occupies the driver's seat.

For Joe's well-being, it is vital that he climb back into the driver's seat and steer his own life in the direction of his choosing. It is time that he release himself from the prison of self-desertion. Instead of squelching the urge to be free, he needs to embrace it. He needs to honor himself by following the dictates of his own passion, creating his life in ways that enliven him and give him meaning. Invariably, in the process, he'll be pumping new life into his sagging spirit.

Jean Shinoda Bolen, a psychiatrist and author, says: "When we attend to the soul's need, we experience freedom." For Joe, and the rest of us, this means coming out and being alive!

We are truly free when we are powered by the initiative to direct our own life.

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