

The War for Peace within Ourselves: By André Chappelle

David F Allen*

Distinguished life Fellow, American Psychiatric Association, Founder and Director, The Family: People Helping People Project, USA

***Corresponding Author:** David F Allen, Distinguished life Fellow, American Psychiatric Association, Founder and Director, The Family: People Helping People Project, USA.

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"Peace is not the absence of war or struggle...Peace is the absence of fear in the midst of our struggle"

-André Chappelle

Abstract

The Bahamas, like most countries in the region of the Americas, suffered from a devastating, country-wide cocaine epidemic in the 1980s. This produced wide-spread addiction among many promising young persons. Mr. André Chappelle was an intelligent young man from a distinguished family who was exposed to excellent educational opportunities and particularly showed a special talent for dealing with interpersonal problems as well as basic technology. Sadly, when introduced to crack cocaine, he claimed his world changed. Leaving his safe enclave where he had everything at his disposal, he moved into the inner city and his addiction led him on a powerful downward spiral where he became homeless and lived as a vagrant. Even though he suffered what we would term 'malignant addiction', Mr. Chappelle was always descent, kind and willing to lend a helping hand to persons from all walks of life. As one person described, 'André Chappelle gave dignity to homeless people on the streets and was like an angel who was there for anyone, despite their background'.

Through a transcendental experience of faith, Mr. Chappelle went through a powerful transformation on December 25, 2009, which led to him changing his lifestyle and becoming drug-free. Joining The Family: People Helping People Project in 2011, he discovered the gift of sharing his story of shame and pain in a contemplative environment of acceptance, love and non-judgmental listening. Releasing his repressed shame, he became open to the loving responses of people in the Family groups and the surrounding community. Having a deep appetite for learning, he was able to integrate the theoretical knowledge of the Family groups with his experience in addiction. This qualified him as a powerful teacher and healer who reached out to many persons in the Bahamas and the United States. Unfortunately, this journey was cut short by his severe illness. The following paper is a distillation of his thoughts, which was presented to the Family Training Institute on September 24, 2016.

Keywords: *Peace; Struggle; Bahamas*

Introduction

As we search for peace in our daily lives, our own hidden fears and their partner anger become the triggers which prevent us from experiencing tranquility and peace.

In the turbulent and chaotic world which swarms about our daily lives, all we want is a little peace, just a little sliver of a taste, where for a moment we can set aside the baggage of our life and escape into a world without care or concern--a place where problems are

suspended, reality is ignored and we are at peace in ourselves and the world. If only everybody else understood the unwritten rules and abided by our unspoken wishes, we could hold on to this peace. But unfortunately, the car in front of us didn't get the memo, and in an instant, this peace evaporates into a hot button some fool just pressed.

Addiction

Behind every form of addiction is the desire to attain a feeling. Some chase the high, some chase the low, many want to just escape being ourselves because it's all about changing how we feel or don't want to feel. We take an external substance or activity to change the way we feel internally. This pattern develops and the behavior becomes a habit and the habit becomes an addiction which determines our priorities.

Even behaviors are addictive. For example, the angry, aggressive co-worker rules the roost through intimidating, well-timed, selectively targeted and measured outbursts. Notice the word "measured". Control is the objective and becomes the addiction, rewarding us with feelings of insatiable dominance. Our fix must be satisfied. The brain constantly brings to our remembrance feelings of euphoric recall of the highs, but never the devastating, painful lows.

In that initial introduction to the reward of an external substance or activity, there is an overwhelming, euphoric pause of tranquility and peace. For this moment in time, all is well. It is for this euphoric recall that we will sacrifice anyone or anything to achieve again and again, where our head and our heart are in peaceful synchronization with each other. Temporarily devoid of fear, we are filled with nothing but hope at the possibilities of what could be. But the reality is, we find it unbearable to live with ourselves, so we need a break, a pause, a moment of peace, a moment of power, and our addiction provides instantaneous gratification on demand and never lets us down. This dynamic then governs our whole life.

With the introduction of cocaine to the Bahamas in the early 80's [1], our population discovered an immediate ticket to internal fulfillment and temporary inner peace. Cocaine filled the gap of our shame false self--the gap between the reality of who we really are and the dreams of our and others' expectations. Cocaine, alcohol, gambling, sexual additions, cigarettes, and even our cell phones or addictive shopping all give us the sense of well-being, that all is well with the world and for a moment we're at peace, enjoying ourselves.

Let's look at the state of our young men today. Their repeated exposure to abandonment, humiliation and rejection at an early age has left them hardened, as many have experienced so many disappointments that it's less painful to not feel (or love) than to allow themselves to be open and vulnerable. As fellow human beings, they also have this same inner desire for love, safety, trust and control or power, but today the drug of their choice that always delivers the feeling of adequacy is the GUN. The gun fills the gaps within their empty, unproductive, powerless, shame filled lives because when I have a gun, I have power, I can produce, and people do what I say. I am somebody, somebody whose voice wants to be heard. But when you only know how to communicate through physical action, if you can't hear what I'm saying, I'm willing to die trying to get my message of pain out. Thus the Bahamas does not only have a violence problem, but a serious communication problem!

At times, we have the ability to even fool ourselves by confusing inner peace with external happiness. And so the genuine pursuit of inner peace is hijacked as we learn to settle for moments of happiness. The problem with happiness is that it is always temporary and circumstantial: a song, a movie, a book, a person, an activity, a beautiful sunset, but in the end, how long does the happiness last? We take pictures of sunsets and sunrises, trying to capture the feeling it gave us, to prolong the feeling of happiness. Some travel the world to seek this happiness, only to find it evades their grasp.

Dr. Allen's Contemplative Discovery Pathway Theory (CDPT)

The Contemplative Discovery Pathway Theory [2] gave me a way to make sense of my life in dealing with the world around us. As we

enter life in our natural state, we seek love, manifested by safety, connection and empowerment (Figure 1). But sadly, life is wounded. A smack on the behind accompanied by rejections and the world becomes a hostile place, leaving us to feel abandoned, rejected and humiliated (Figure 2).

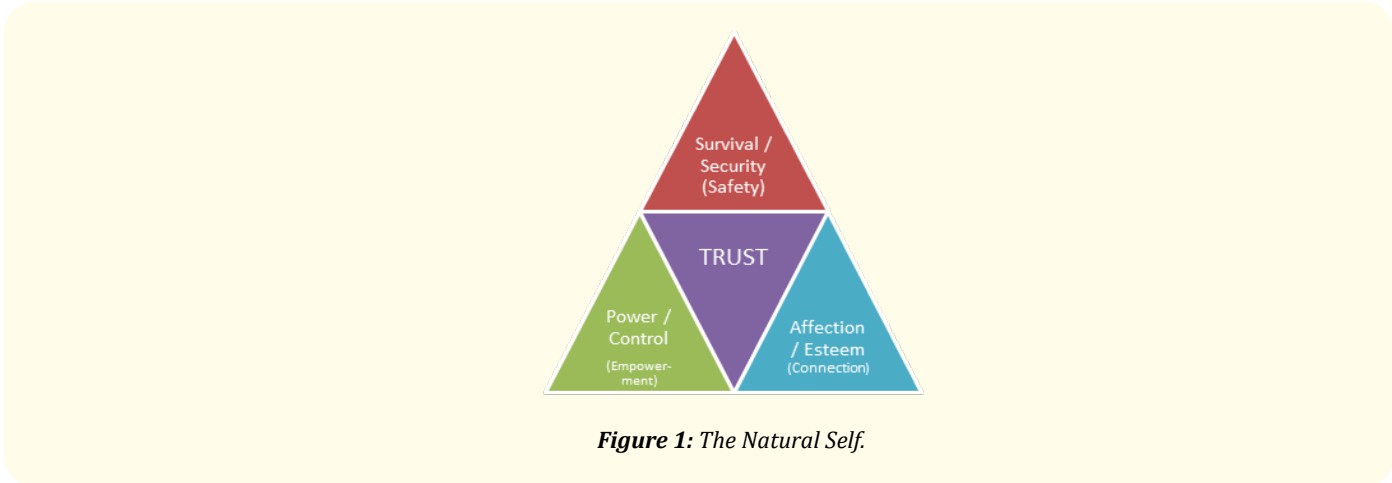


Figure 1: The Natural Self.

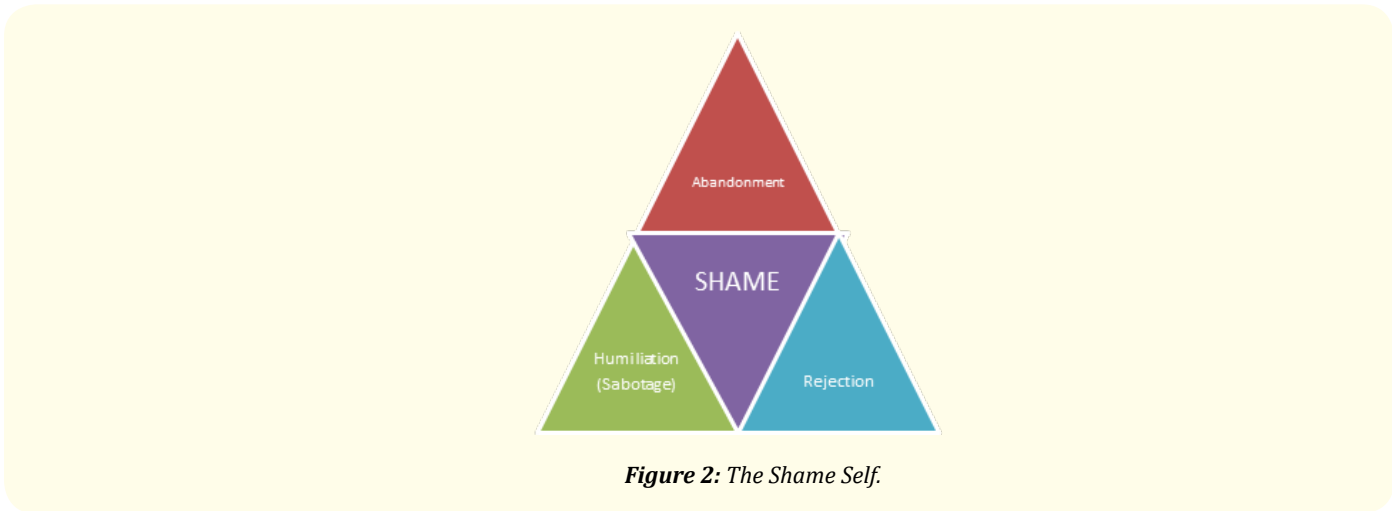


Figure 2: The Shame Self.

And to protect ourselves from experiencing these feelings of shame and pain, we develop a false self involving self-absorption, self-gratification and control based in fear to shield our vulnerable broken heart from being hurt again (Figure 3). Oh, but only if it were that easy, because so often, love masquerades as hurt, and sometimes what we think is love is just more pain. This cycle repeats itself until we become impenetrable, lonely, bitter, wanting to be loved but afraid of the risk involved with letting our guard down to become wounded again. So this False Self is a perverse rescuer. It seeks to block us from pain but tends to hijack our life in the wilderness of fear where we look for substances, behaviors and things to give us pseudo-happiness in developing addictions to block the fear. Sadly, the addiction takes over and our lives are destroyed. Fear now controls our life and it is most powerful because the fear of fear itself is so damaging. The silent voice of our fears play over and over inside our heads, propelling us, immobilizing us, restricting us because of the dreadful memories of humiliation and shame in front of those whose approval we so desperately seek.



Figure 3: *The Shame False Self.*

What Shall We Do?

Have you ever watched people who while in the midst of chaos are still able to exude calm? This is DISCOVERY, where we come to know the difference between what we can control and what we can't. At this point, how we respond to the chaotic situation is based on a choice. Our choice is based on the state of our heart. There are only two foundational emotions in life: fear and love. If our heart is based in the fear, the chaos continues. But if we can make the shift to open our heart to love, we move to experience authenticity (Figure 4). "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).



Figure 4: *The Authentic Self.*

Our response is also predicated on our past. If there are emotional, stressful or traumatic events which have not been addressed, then how we respond is strongly influenced by our own unresolved issues. What makes us angry today is connected to where we were hurt yesterday. No one "makes" us angry. . . becoming angry is our choice!

Somewhere deep below, within the recesses of our heart, still resides the taste of peace woven into the fabric of our being, trying, desperately, to be connected back to its original, authentic source of love, whose byproduct is peace. But life has obstructed, obfuscated, prevaricated, and just plain led us astray from the very truth that would connect us back to our original selves.

The fact is if we take ownership of our truth, regardless how brutal it may be, it no longer has the power to dictate or dominate the emotional fate of our lives, and peace with ourselves is at our heart's door. Forgiveness and letting go are the keys which allow us to walk in peace (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Letting Go.

Acceptance is a powerful moment of transformation, when we consciously accept what fate has handed us. This acceptance, especially when it involves physical pain, allows us to separate the exterior of ourselves from the interior. But when we face and accept our inner pain, the fear subsides and love and healing begin. Then there is the outer acceptance of who we are, what we look like, our hair, our face, our teeth, and the list goes on.

My Personal Journey to Peace

I was once accused of stealing a battery from a pump house near Sir Sidney Poitier Bridge (Paradise Island Bridge). Three men came looking for me based on the words of another man. I was dragged to the pump house, tied to a chair, and beaten with a cutlass and a shovel handle for two or three hours. After a while the pain no longer mattered. It became a matter of mental endurance.

There were also times when my tooth became so infected, that half my face would swell up and the only way I knew how to temporarily alleviate the tooth ache was to bang my head against the wall.

During these events the only inner peace I had involved drugs. But these experiences taught me how to separate what's going on outside from what's going on inside.

Once the fear of the physical pain passes there comes some semblance of inner relief, a calmness, even in the midst of the violence. There is no escape, no point in fighting, only acceptance that my fate lies in God's hands and with that understanding there is a place that I learned to go mentally, which allowed me to endure.

According to Marcel Proust "the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes". Once leaving the streets and making peace with myself and God, my journey of self-discovery began. The Family: People Helping People Project [3,4] and CDPT forced me to face what I feared the most about myself. You will never conquer what you don't confront!

There were deep scars of abandonment, humiliation, and rejection that I had run from my whole life and would never have admitted to anyone. But in The Family, I began to open up by telling my story and sharing my fears. The beautiful thing was, this was met by love and it produced peace within my heart. I came to realize that our heart is like a sponge. It becomes filled with the hurt, fear and shame of a lifetime, often blocking love and hope, pushing our life towards despair. When we can squeeze the sponge to empty the hurt and shame by sharing our story in a caring environment like The Family, we make space for love to enter our hearts and peace soon follows.

This peace I treasure and value and it acts like a barometer, for whenever I sense my inner stillness being ruffled, I check myself. I check myself because it's not what's happening on the outside that determines the state of my inner world, but rather it's the peace of God within me that allows me to determine how to respond. This is a choice: the choice to respond either from a heart of fear or a heart of love. You can either be a thermostat or a thermometer!

I don't know if gratitude is a fruit of peace or if peace is a fruit of gratitude, but I do know that they enhance each other. Without peace in my heart, the pace of this world doesn't allow me the ability to stop and smell the roses of life. To be grateful for a particular moment in time requires a peaceful slowing down in acknowledgement of the simplicity of God's creative beauty. Without either, the mystery and joy of life evades the living.

Thus the struggle to regain what was originally lost becomes a chase to replace an original with a counterfeit. The counterfeit is the temporary moments of peace, most often acquired through an external substance or activity. The casual cocktail at the end of a long day, brings that immediate sense of relaxation and the ability to unwind, but it's honestly just a false bus ride to that counterfeit peace.

Conclusion

As the old song says, "Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die." I have cancer. I am facing a big challenge in my life. It is not easy because there are so many unknowns. But my story will soon be over and my film will soon end. The person I need more than anybody now is Jesus and I have a personal relationship with him. I have chosen to look at my diagnosis, not as a death sentence, but rather a gift of life. Time is to be lived as time is the currency of life.

This presentation about peace was born in the midst of this extraordinary challenge to my life. But in spite of the unknowns, there is a loving Being greater than ourselves who wants to restore our heart back to its authentic state. What I want to leave with you is the reality that to achieve this authentic state, we must be willing to squeeze the sponge of our heart of pain and shame by telling our authentic story and make space for love. When this happens, fear slips away and the love story begins to reconnect within our heart and peace begins to flow.

Remember, peace is not the absence of war or struggle. Peace is the absence of fear in the midst of our struggle!

Thank you all for your support during my time on the streets, particularly around the Oakes Field area. I am also grateful for those of you who believed in me to make a comeback and experience my authentic life through God's healing grace. I ask your forgiveness for anything that I might have said or done to any of you that may have caused hurt, pain or fear. As I leave you, please remember, peace is possible, in spite of the struggle. Finally, I want to say a special 'Thank You' to my Princess Kim who has loved me with a love far deeper than I could have ever dreamed. Thank You All...Goodbye!

André Chappelle (September 24, 2016)

Epilogue

This very important presentation by André Chappelle is the riveting experience of a person who travelled the darkest canyon of addiction and arose to lead a life of love, peace and help for many people. As a psychiatrist, I saw André for the first time when he was fifteen years old. As time went on, crack cocaine took a hold of him. There were times when he was able to leave it and have periods of sobriety.

But eventually, the crack addiction took a hold of him, catapulting him from the exclusive haven of Lyford Cay (in Nassau, Bahamas) into the hustle and bustle of the inner city community 'Bain Town'. Living as a vagrant on the street for 20 years, in spite of his addiction, he was still known as a descent, polite and respectable young man. He was always helpful to many people. For example, he would assist those who needed their tires changed, college students who needed tutoring and many persons who needed an encouraging word. After many attempts of rehabilitation in different parts of the world, he still sank back into his chronic addiction. But on Christmas Day, 2009, around 2:00 a.m., in the lonely McDonalds parking lot in Oakes Field he claims Jesus Christ came to him and told him to stop his destructive lifestyle. With the help of friends, particularly a business lady and a very distinguished lawyer, he was able to acquire the funds needed to reconnect with his sister, who was living abroad. During this time with her, he continued to work on himself. After a period of time away, he felt led to return to his home, the Bahamas, where he became a counselor at Teen Challenge, a spiritually-based drug rehabilitation center.

In 2011, he started to attend The Family: People Helping People Project, where he studied my basic psychological theory, the Contemplative Discovery Pathway Theory. He experienced a powerful self-awareness, which allowed him to move beyond his addiction and recovery to explore his potential in DISCOVERY. He explored his hurt trail and confronted his shame, which haunted him throughout his life and which he believed to be the engine of his addiction. Describing the process in his own words, he said "Our heart is like a sponge which absorbs the hurt, shame and pain throughout our life, eventually blocking love, hope, and peace". Through The Family Project he was able to share his story in an atmosphere of love, mindfulness and non-judgmental listening. This allowed him to release his hurt and shame and discover freedom of his authentic self in a drug-free lifestyle. As a result, he became a facilitator in The Family group sessions and eventually the Administrative Director of The Family: People Helping People Project. He helped many people through his radio, television and public speaking engagements. He enabled many persons in the program to find new hope and encouragement in spite of the devastating circumstances of their life. After hearing of André's death, a gentleman from Florida wrote me that when alcohol took over his life and he had lost his family, he met André who told him to stop drinking because you "can never be as bad as I was". André's words motivated him to stop drinking and eventually reunite with his family. He wrote, "Dr. Allen, André was an angel in our midst and we did not know it".

To me, André's life is a metaphor of hope for the Bahamas. One morning while André and I were giving a presentation to the law enforcement agency of our country, one of the chief officials asked me if I saw any hope for violence and crime in The Bahamas. After a pause, I said "Yes, look at André. I failed when I tried to help him, but twenty-five years later, God changed André's life, and now he works as my assistant. In other words, I failed, but God passed. This is the hope for our country".

Sadly for all of us, after battling the pain of terminal cancer for five months, André passed on peacefully on Saturday, December 17, 2016, at his home with his loving wife Kim by his side. Raising his head, he opened his arms as he was received into the heavenly promised land. This fulfilled the mission of his favorite Bible verse: "He that began a good work in me is faithful to see it to its completion" Philipians 1:6.

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