

George Laws Social Work Services LLC

RAGE: ROAD, HOME, WORK, PLAY, LOVE

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BOULDER—Rage can harm whether it's at home, at work or on the road. Home rage, work rage and road rage are apt descriptions of where rage occurs. Now that the focus of rage is on the roads, where we all go, perhaps we will take a closer look at how we can prevent rage.

Rage is an old problem, as old as civilization itself. Rage is the result of unresolved traumatic stress. To resolve rage, we need to heal trauma. A definition of trauma is that it is a rupture in our self-protective barrier against action that would lead to feelings of overwhelming helplessness. It's like each of us have this space suit that we live in, which protects us from dangerous and life-threatening occurrences in our life. However once traumatized it's as though the person's safety suit has holes in it and their life-support systems are in danger of being sucked out into space. Therefore, they exist in a threatened state and are excessively alarmed and being put on alert. They may tend to be easily frustrated, anxious and prone to react violently to otherwise adaptable situations. Their ability to function in their social and personal relationships has been impaired by the accumulation of daily stress and unresolved traumatic stress.

Humans exist, along with other mammals, within the animal kingdom and the laws of nature apply to us whether we are driving a car or being prey to a tiger. Humans are built to survive. A healthy human will protect itself from forces of threat by mobilizing a great deal of physical energy (e.g. an adrenaline rush) into the fight and/or flight strategies. When neither of these two strategies are chosen, or effective, an immobility or freeze response will take place. So, now we have a third alternative to fight and flight - the freeze response. Dr. Peter Levine, in his book *Waking the Tiger* describes this response well. What happens is that the mobilized survival energies, of the nervous system's physiological defensive responses, are suspended and left incomplete when the one threatened does not have adequate

resources to master and succeed against the threat. This energy is physically locked in the organism until the instinctive responses are physically felt and the impulses allowed to complete in a healthy fashion. This can happen through processes such as Somatic Experiencing and EMDR,

In the summer of 1997, a hummingbird smashed into our window. I watched it as it reorganized its life-force energies. At first it appeared dead. It was in a shock trauma, a freeze state. I noticed that it would breathe a little at a time. Being a student of Somatic Experiencing, I know that wild animals have an instinctive capacity to heal when having experienced a traumatic freeze state. I knew that I might risk giving it a second shock by nurturing (capturing) it. Humans are a threat by wild animals. So too, entrapment if I was to put it in a box for recovery. I left it with its own innate intelligence to organize coming out of the freeze state. Over time it began to blink one eye, then another. Later, it began to move its neck, this way and then that. Much later it moved one wing then the other. Then its whole body began to shudder and shake. It was discharging the energy aroused to meet the threat of the trauma. Its nervous system was integrating the events. After more than 3 hours it flew away having generated and organized a healing from within the core of its being. Most humans have forgotten this intrinsic method to heal naturally and patiently from a trauma.

Many will deny the severity and occurrence of a shock trauma and suppress the body's need to generate and organize an organic self-healing after a traumatic shock. Often immediately following an accident they will, brush away their body's need to re-organize and reorient. After meeting the police and exchanging insurance information many will rush off to work or wherever their destination is. Later that day they start to feel the stiffness, pain and suffering as the after-effects of the collision set in. These symptoms signify the need to reestablish order and an orientation to safety, instead their reactivations of arousal and alarm are heightened. What ought to happen is to let

out (discharge) traumatic stress over time, in a safe space, like the wild animals do. They will retreat and hold up as they discharge the stress autonomically, that is, automatically from the inside out. An unhealthy reactivation to earlier unresolved traumatic stress is that of suppression, then compression, then depression which can erupt as uncontrolled rage where the compressed traumatic energy explodes. Wild animals' autonomic governors are set to resolve trauma. They take the time to heal. Civilized humans override (suppress, compress, depress) these instinctive process and clog the powerful survival energy causing a need to re-enact the traumatic energy, causing more harm and disorganization in theirs and others' lives. This is costly, emotionally, mentally, physically, socially, and financially. One of the most preferred yet problematic solutions is denial. This denial supports a psychology of denial which at first sets in as symptoms and aftereffects of the trauma. These symptoms are formed to compensate and manage the intense frozen survival energies in the body. Over time this denial prevails as a lifestyle a syndrome of beliefs and conditions formulated from the post-traumatic stress.

The new savanna is the roadway. When we travel in our motor vehicles our lives are at risk and our bodies physically respond to this threat, consciously and unconsciously. The faster we go, the more we need to orient to the road and other drivers. Consciously, we are concentrating on other than driving, hearing our radio, getting from here to there, looking at a handsome person in the next car. When SCREECH!!! RED brake lights beaming!!!

The car in front of us has STOPPED. You are driving and think, "They can't do that we're going 60 mph." You slam on your brakes as you brace for the impact, your body tightens. I'm riding with you and I hit the non-existent brake on the passenger's side, my feet pressing into the floor. My heart seems to drop to my feet, my breathing halts. There is nowhere to flee, nothing to fight. I can't fight for my life. I'm trapped. Feeling trapped I shrink inside. My body can't flee or fight, everything seems to be

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going in slow-motion (I am entering the freeze response). Our car is skidding into the back of theirs, I watch your body as it further constricts muscles tightening, while your arms are braced, heavy on the steering wheel. Yet, somehow you steer to swerve and miss their car (flight response). You succeed. Both cars come to a stop. You get out and start yelling at the driver, (fight response). No one was hurt. No need to call the authorities. Got to get to work on time. So, you hurry up, get back on the road and into life. Everything is OK now. Or, is it?

As the driver, your life was threatened. You felt overwhelmed, terrified and somewhat defeated, yet you managed to complete a successful flight response - you didn't hit the other car. You mastered the situation, you fought to miss their car and in so doing, you released much of the survival energy that was aroused and you spent more of your fight response when you leapt out of the car shouted out with "fighting" words,

However, I am feeling the effects of a shock trauma, I was unable to personally complete either a flight or fight response. The survival energy that rocketed within me is still in my body. I watched as your body shook and your voice trembled. Numb with alarming shock, I couldn't even speak.

So, maybe I am just a little more irritable than you. I need to suppress all this energy, this frozen state and pass off as being OK, when I am not. I too need to get to work so I just stuff it.

I have just collected some more undischarged energy, stored it up in my bank of stress where it accumulates with interest. Only to draw on it when I once again feel alarmed, threatened or frustrated which may trigger an eruption at someone or something, as though they are threatening me and my life. Perhaps, just being on the roadway itself will begin to feed these fears for my own safety, where I become the danger to myself and others. Yet, one may operate under the belief that, 'I will be OK.' When, with clarity one's know in their depths of knowing, that they are taking risks. Yet, that is denied.

Separation from our instinctive responses affects our resiliency. Denying is separating and is unhealthy. Relaxation exercises in themselves are not enough. Pills may pacify temporarily. We need to learn to allow for the discharging of traumatic stress. Unresolved trauma can be healed. Recognizing that traumatic reactions such as, rage, anxiety, and depression represent are symptoms that communicate the need to respect and sense your natural body instincts for healing and reorganizing have been denied and overridden neglecting the opportunity for receiving nature's lessons in healing traumas.

These healing instincts can be used to assimilate the elements of the event, post-traumatic symptoms and syndromes, into healthy states for vital functioning. adaptations transcend

A wild animal will give their nervous system time to discharge the energy of the events. Human's, "hurry up", "Try Hard", "Get on with it", "Fake it until, I make it" In short human's pretend not to know, rather than attend to their knowing! Which is wiser?

(Learning from a trauma specialist can assist you upon your path of recovery and resilience. Everyone can come to understand and heal rage, rage at home, at work and on the roads. There exists the need to understand rage as primarily a physiopathology that can be healed naturally before denial leads to a psychopathology of denial.)