



Our guest columnist this month is Barbara Berger, author of *Fast Food for the Soul* and other books.

Who is responsible for your partner's happiness?

Since so many people have problems in their relationships, it might be a good idea to look at another aspect of the dynamic of troubled relationships. So what happens when one of the partners is abusive and continually scolds, blames and violates the other person's boundaries. What is going on here? First of all let me make it clear that by abusive behavior, I don't just mean physical violence. Verbal abuse is emotional violence and can be just as harmful as physical abuse.

When a partner is verbally abusive, it is often disguised in and justified by beliefs like: *If you love me you'll do what I want. My happiness depends on my partner (you are making me unhappy). My partner is responsible for my happiness*, etc. The abusive partner will often put pressure on the partner saying how much he/she loves the partner and how terribly unhappy the other person's behavior is making him/her. When this happens, the abusive partner is basically saying "You are responsible for my happiness."

Unfortunately in this type of relationship, the passive partner (the one on the receiving end) believes what the other partner is saying. The passive partner believes that he/she is responsible for the other person's happiness. So both the aggressor (the abusive partner) and the passive (the abused partner) believe the same story — that the passive person is guilty of not living up to what the abuser believes is necessary to make the relationship function. And since both partners believe the same thing, a situation like this can go on for years. Both are living under the same delusion — that one person can be responsible for another person's happiness.

It's like me saying to you: You are responsible for the way I think and feel. When I put it like this, you can see how insane this belief is. So in relationships where one partner is blaming the other partner, we need to look at the belief that one person can be responsible for another person's thoughts and feelings. Because the reality is that this is impossible. One person cannot be responsible for another person's thoughts and feelings.

This is not a question of good or bad or right or wrong, this is just the way things are. If you look carefully at the nature of mind you will see that this is a completely impersonal mechanism that has nothing to do with who you are or what you think. It's just the way things are — and the way things are is that every single person has his/her own thoughts and emotions. Things happen and then each individual has his or her thoughts about what's going on. Events in and of themselves have no inherent value, but that each person gives each event a value by his or her interpretation of what's going on. So if you like what's going on you think it's good and you're happy and if you don't like what's going

on, you think it's bad and you're unhappy. It's as simple as that.

This is very important to keep in mind because it tells us that no matter how "close" two people are, each is still living in their own mental universe which is determined by their thoughts. And this means that each person's reactions are based on their interpretation of events — and not on the other person's behavior.

With this in mind we can see that in a relationship where there's an abuser and abused partner, both have the same mistaken belief — that one person is responsible for another person's happiness. This mistaken belief is disempowering for both parties because the reality is I am responsible for my thoughts and feelings and you are responsible for your thoughts and feelings.

This is why it feels so uncomfortable when you try to "force" someone else to do what you want them to do... and why it feels so uncomfortable when someone else tries to "force" you to do what they want you to do because it can't be done. It's impossible.

So the first step in learning to deal with this kind of unhealthy situation is to think deeply about these statements: *I am not responsible for how you think or feel. That's your job. You are not responsible for how I think or feel. I am responsible for how I think and feel. That's my job.*

And of course when there is verbal abuse based on this serious misunderstanding, the next step is to learn how to be assertive, set limits and tell your partner *yes dear I hear what you are saying and I'm not responsible for how you feel.*



*Barbara Berger is the internationally known, best-selling author of **Fast Food for the Soul** (published in 30 languages), **Are You Happy Now?** and **The Awakening Human Being - A Guide to the Power of Mind** which was just released in the US and the UK. The book can be ordered on Amazon.com. Find out more about [Barbara Berger](#).*