

# **Living Beyond Emotional Triggers**

## **By JP Sears, P-P-S Mentor**

Have you ever flown off the handle at someone only to look back at the emotional carnage left in your wake to say, “How did that happen?” Have you ever noticed yourself directing your own emotional shrapnel inward rather than outward, hiding it from others with the veil of piercing silence? When you are emotionally charged, do you get bigger and aggressive by puffing up your chest or do you get smaller and passive hoping to go un-noticed?

All people get emotionally triggered and act it out in different ways. Our purpose in this article is not to erase this very human experience. Instead our purpose is to give ourselves a new found capacity to control the otherwise uncontrollable reactions and find out how not to lose our presence to emotional triggering as frequently or intensely as we otherwise would.

### **What Does it Mean to be Emotionally Triggered?**

Being emotionally triggered is an experience of being overcome by an emotion and then reacting without mindful intent to that emotion. When this happens it's not so much that we're a person with the emotion, it's more like we are the emotion with a little bit of person involved!

When triggered, our ability to respond to a situation is greatly minimized because we are being overwhelmed. The result is that we just live through the reaction. This situation is much like when your doctor checks your knee reflexes. When her reflex hammer strikes the patella tendon, your leg reflexively jerks upward and this is pure reaction. Much the same, when emotionally triggered our actions and words come from an unconscious place, a level of consciousness far below that of conscious consideration.

You'll see a lot of emotionally triggered people acting out very reactive behavior during episodes of road rage. You can watch people retaliate for being cut off, leaning out of their cars screaming, even people getting out of their cars to fight. Putting their safety in jeopardy that way is nothing but pure reaction to being emotionally triggered. If the same person were to respond rather than react, where he considers the consequences of his actions and whether they will improve his situation, we would see a tremendous altering of the acted out behavior. That is because the decision about how to act would come from a conscious place, rather than a dark, constricted, reactive level of unconsciousness.

We all have our unique emotional triggers. They could be anything ranging from a spouse leaving a mess in the kitchen, a child talking back to us, a coworker disregarding our input to a conversation, or how a parent still treats us like a kid.

### **How Does Being Triggered Look?**

The scene of being emotionally triggered can take on one of two polarities, either active or passive reactions.

The first polarity of active reaction is likely the one we think of most with emotionally charged behavior. Shouting, insulting, defending one's actions, blaming others, and even violence toward another are characteristics of the active reaction. If we pay attention to when we fall into this category, we may notice trembling of our hands, our throat constricting making it very hard to speak words in a normal tone of voice, and difficulty controlling what words we do speak. These behaviors are all very childish ones acted out by otherwise mature adults, which is a mirror for the level of consciousness one descends to when triggered.

The other polarity of behavior accompanying emotional triggering is that of passive reaction. It is very helpful for us to consider this aspect of polarity as we could otherwise be seducing others into believing we're calm, cool and collected, and more importantly actually deceiving enough to make ourselves believe the same even though we're far from it!

Passively reaction is just as reactive as an active reaction. Here our behavior isn't so much acted out, but rather it's acted in. When cut off in traffic, instead of yelling at the other person for being in our way, we feel sorry that we weren't out of their way sooner. We can become disassociated from our thoughts and emotions, leaving us with very little cognitive memory of details. Or we can experience almost a paralysis where we are so charged that we can say or do nothing. It is worth reaffirming that passive reactions are dangerous territory because they can hide us from the fact that we are triggered in the first place as we take on the external appearance of a conscious response of tranquility.

With active and passive reaction, because one is no better or worse than the other, our purpose is to notice what their terrain can look like so we are able realize when we're in it!

### **Why do we Get Emotionally Triggered?**

Being emotionally triggered is more often than not the symptom of a deeper core emotional experience, usually emanating from the humiliating core emotions of fear or shame. Our triggered response oozes out of these deeper emotions for a number of reasons.

One reason is for self preservation. When we are not able to access our mature adult ability to experience and process fear or shame, we use triggered behavior, largely being inward or outward projected anger, in order to divert ourselves away from our inner experience in the moment. We do this both for emotional and physical self preservation. Dr. David Hawkins points out that fear and shame carry very low vibrational frequencies, shame being the lowest out of all emotions and therefore the most threatening. We look to nature where it is said that the fox never kills the rabbit because the rabbit dies of fear before the fox gets to it. With this we realize the reactive technique of deflecting from threatening emotions we've developed is very purposeful! However we also realize that without going back to resolve the emotional chaos once we are removed from the heat of the moment, we stay frozen and reactive.

Few of us are taught in schools or at home how to experience fear without being afraid of it or how to experience shame without being ashamed of it, which puts our healing and processing on the back burner while our emotional reactions continue to get ignited. With that said, it is my experience that an essential ingredient to minimizing how often and to what magnitude we get emotionally triggered is giving ourselves permission to process our core emotions of fear and shame by simply experiencing them.

Other times we find ourselves being emotionally triggered by a person or situation not because we're upset about them, though that is how it appears, but because the person or situation instantly reminds us of an unresolved wound from our past that we're still upset about at some level. This, considered with the above possibilities, implies that whenever we're able to catch our breath after being emotionally charged, we can look back for the messages about our deeper inner experience that are there to be learned.

### **Going Beyond Emotional Triggers**

Now that we have some characteristics of triggers and why they happen we can entertain approaches to lessen the inertia they have on us.

I will ask you to consider simply observing yourself the next time you are triggered. When we can notice our reactive tendencies to being triggered with an

alert recognition the force of the trigger is reduced greatly. When noticing ourselves we become both the player and the observer. When not noticing ourselves we are just the player which means we're completely enveloped in a low level of reactive consciousness. At those times we are the observer as well as the player, there is at least a portion of our awareness that is removed from the level of unconscious and resides at a more ascended level.

You may also choose to notice the temptation to avoid even acknowledging the fact that you are triggered at all. We can become triggered about being triggered and slip into denial about it. The notion that what we resist persists suggests that if we did nothing other than acknowledge when we are triggered and reacting in our own unique way, we've already begun the process of diffusion.

Another strategy available to us once we are triggered is to purposefully take a slow breath prior to engaging in words or actions. Because the slow breath is initiated with conscious intent, it allows more consciousness to come in diluting an otherwise unaware domain. As the breath detaches us from the stronghold of reactivity we are able to interface with responsiveness; where we are able to think before we speak or act, unfreeze our paralysis, and most importantly process the emotional energy within our bodies.

## **Conclusion**

By having some clues about what it means to be emotionally triggered, why we get triggered, and what triggers us, we can recognize when we are in unstable terrain. This is necessary before we can move to higher ground. Utilizing subtle skills for lessening the intensity of our emotional triggering allows us to become a responsive person with emotions rather than a reactive bundle of emotional dynamite towing a person behind.