

OVERLOAD
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Now here is a touchy issue, my own emotional upheavals. When I discover (I don't always even know) that I am emotionally upset by something, I have learned I must be much more careful than usual. Years ago I had a little mantra that I whispered to myself, "We will withstand shocks out-breaking." I have no idea who I meant by "we," but I guess it was all of us. Anyway, back then (much like now) emotional shocks of one sort or another were always out-breaking. Let's face it; some things in life (even little things) are hard to take, especially if we are sensitive.

I never know when an emotional load might suddenly land on my shoulders and overload my capacitors. My first dharma teacher used to say "I have no pot to piss in," meaning he had nowhere to unload the charge that I am sure he must have carried at times. He did not want to just dump on those around him.

Unfortunately that is what most of us do. We can't help ourselves. The overload just spills over and usually on to those nearest to us, often the ones we love and cherish the most. And it can happen like lightning.

I receive some bad news or something upsets me. Of course I try to manage it, but as often as not it is going to take me some time to process this bit of upset and there I am, right in the middle of whatever I am doing, perhaps surrounded by my family or other people. The last thing I want to do is unload this charge onto someone else, but I am too proud to stop the presses and tell everyone I am having a problem.

Often I don't have time (or don't want to make it public) that I am carrying a charge from somewhere, something, and perhaps someone else that has nothing to do with where I am right now or whomever I am with. Despite attempts on my part to control, my upset just escapes me and before I know it I have dumped the charge (the whole load) onto what otherwise would be a normal communication, charging the whole moment. It can get heavy like that real fast.

Of course, I should immediately apologize and acknowledge that I am under some kind of stress, but too often I try to contain myself and not burden others with what are obviously my problems. And there is the pride issue too. Keeping quiet about it would be fine if I COULD contain myself and if some lightning rod of a moment didn't discharge me onto a friend or family member. Bam! The harm is already done.

Before I know it I have created a situation that demands an apology on my part, and if those around me react with shock or hurt at what I have just laid on them (and they react in turn), the whole scene escalates into a full-scale drama and sometimes all hell breaks loose.

Often, before I know it, I too am taking offence and the original discharge is lost in the general carpet bombing going on around me. It is worse if I don't acknowledge where it is coming from, i.e. me.

I wish I could just issue a warning if I am carrying a loaded charge, like "Get back folks, I'm losing it," but that seldom happens and the overload just slips out and charges the atmosphere. If I could be out front about what is happening, perhaps then others could give me a little latitude as I try to manage my own emotions. However, if I try to keep it private and then lose control, this is really unfair to those around me.

When my feelings get hurt or something untoward happens, it is very difficult not to end up with a charge that won't quickly dissipate. And it can be one of those all-day suckers that will take time for me to work through until it trickles down to anything normal. The bigger the front, the bigger the back.

In the meantime, the best I can do is try to steer clear of other people, but that is not always easy either, especially with family whom otherwise I have encouraged to be near. Even if I announce that I am under a heavy charge, this is not always enough. I try to get off by myself and let it all blow over because close proximity can be explosive when I am upset, but somehow the charge is still communicated and fills the air. All of a sudden, everyone is walking on pins and needles.

And I am not the only one with this problem. As a counselor for more years than I want to mention, this phenomenon is epidemic and worldwide. The Buddhists call these emotional upheavals, the kleshas, and they also point out that they are very difficult to remove.

And these emotional events happen so organically. There I am, happy as a clam, and I get some bad news or take offense at something that someone does or says. All of a sudden I am overwhelmed with emotion, just fully charged, not expecting it, and unable to control it well enough. I try.

And the sad thing is that the first person that appears in my wake becomes the lightning rod and gets the discharge, often the full load. It could be our dog who did something

wrong or perhaps my wife or kids who just happened to wander into the room. Before I know it I get heavy-handed and what otherwise would be a simple remark on my part becomes a loaded remark, one that sets off a war of words or whatever.

To make matters worse, I too often try to contain it rather than acknowledge it, but the cat is already out of the bag, the harm done. If I would instantly apologize and admit my upset, it would help. But at those times it seems I can't bring myself to cop to it and instead continue to think I can manage what is already obviously unmanageable.

As mentioned, if I would humble myself enough to communicate to those around me that I am upset, they would comfort me I am sure. I could have an orderly discharge and de-escalation. I would feel better too. Pride on my part does not help. Bottling all this stuff up results in anger and attempts to contain it lead to explosions -- a vicious cycle.

These kind of upsets for many of us are not about to stop happening, I am sure. They can be remedied, but the remedy takes a lot of work on my part to apprehend my hair-trigger reactions and learn to respond to bad news or insult differently, to not take it so personally. That will take time, and I am working on it. Buddhist mind training and the awareness it brings has been the most helpful. Meanwhile, I am doing my best to fess up to those around me when I get a sudden overload.

Speaking of overloads, I can't help but think of the great song by Glen Campbell, "Wichita Lineman," which I will share here for anyone who has a minute for a sidebar.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTfwcLdP5Xk>

Does this ring a bell and how do you folks handle this?

