Dear Reader,

Welcome to a new understanding of burnout for our times. This is a sample chapter of my book, *The Joy of Burnout*. Please note that it is for personal use only.

If you want to buy the whole book at a discounted price, or to buy CDs and tapes, or download audio Imagework exercises (only available via my website), you can go to the online shop on my website, [http://www.dinaglouberman.com/shop/](http://www.dinaglouberman.com/shop/)

Warmly,

Dina Glouberman
THE JOY OF BURNOUT

How the end of the world can be a new beginning

Dr Dina Glouberman

SKYROSBOOKS

Copyright © 2002, 2012 by Dr Dina Glouberman

First Published in Great Britain in 2002 by Hodder and Stoughton
A division of Hodder Headline

Kindle edition 2012

The right of Dr Dina Glouberman to be identified as the Author of the Work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher.

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library


Excerpt from 'East Coker' taken from Collected Poems 1909-1962 by T. S. Elliot, courtesy of Faber and Faber Ltd

PUBLISHED BY
Skyros Books
9 Eastcliff Road
Shanklin
Isle of Wight
P0376AA
Tel: +44 (0) 1983865566 Fax: +44 (0) 983865537
E-mail: office@skyros.com
www.skyros.com
One sunny afternoon, I was working with a group in our Atsitsa centre in Skyros on resolving our unfinished business with important people in our lives. People were sitting around the stone circle we call the Magic Circle, overlooking the trees and the sea, conducting whispered conversations with various people in their lives, living or dead. There was a surrealistic flavour to the scene.

Suddenly one young man, Matt, began to sob in a heartrending way. He had just seen and acknowledged that his mother really didn't love him after all.

To everyone's surprise, yet not to Matt's, I said, 'Good, now you know.'

I sensed that the moment Matt acknowledged what seemed to be a hopeless loveless reality, he could give up on his life-long doomed efforts to gain his mother's love and open up to a new life full of the love that really was available to him now. Some day he might revisit this conversation with his mother, and realize that on another level, his mother did indeed love him, though not in the way he once needed and expected.

Without giving up his old hope for the love of his mother, Matt could not let go of his hopelessness and lovelessness and move towards love and joy. This is one of those paradoxes of Radical Healing.

We have now begun to wait and listen. This chapter is about how we can take a further step by giving up hope both for the future and for the past, while still keeping the faith. Although this may lead us through feelings of despair, resentment and regret, it will also bring us to the moment when we acknowledge what it is we can trust and surrender to. We are then free to be in the present. Before that, we were living in hope. Now, we can begin just to live. This is one of the most important lessons burnout has to offer us.

**Give up hope for the future**

We often say, 'Hope is the only thing that keeps me going.' Yet so often hope is what T. S. Eliot called 'hope for the wrong thing'. It is for something that we once believed we wanted but may no longer be right for us, if it ever was. What we really need is more like trust in an unfolding than a hope that a particular dream will come true. This trust has the sweetness that we usually attribute to hope, without the risk of illusion and disillusionment.

**Hopelessness and giving up hope**

When we are burning out, there is usually a combination of profound hopelessness and rigid hope. We are in despair of ever getting what we hoped for and yet we are striving, hope against hope, to get there anyway. We want what we want, and we'll die if we don't get it. So we nearly kill ourselves trying.

Jeff, counselling manager, talked movingly of everything he had to give up:

I had to give up everything — my identity, my future, where I was going. I had to give up the identity of dynamic entrepreneur who got involved with these big projects and went on television. I had to give up the identity of being a psychotherapist. I had to give up my identity as a being a certain kind of friend - sweet, very kind, but too kind, and someone who didn't rock the boat. I had to give up money. For the first time in my working life, I was poor, and still am. So I had to give up some of the other things — glamour -someone who wore certain kinds of expensive clothes, and went to some of the best restaurants and was one of the elite trendy. I had to give up being trendy and interesting. I had to give up being the son I'd been to my parents who didn't rock the boat and who compromised his life for them. I had to give up rescuing my brother — he was mentally ill and I couldn't save him. I had to give up control over what fate had dealt me and my family.

Giving up hope is the opposite of hopelessness because it is trusting in ourselves and in what we may be, given half a chance and loads of patience. But when we stop and wait without hope, our first movement can sometimes be into depression and hopelessness. This form of depression is how we mark the shedding and death of an old part of ourselves, or of an old fantasy about ourselves.

When we give up on old dreams, we do need to grieve them. There is no way around that. And most of us have to give up hope more than once. No matter how bad it feels, remember that this is just nature's way of mourning something that it is time to leave behind. Julie, arts organization director, talked about how she felt depression was necessary for her:

I had to go right to the bottom, to accept that the mask had slipped. There was no Holy Grail and no Golden Fleece. It's like waking up on Christmas night, and realizing that there is no Father Christmas. I allowed myself to despair, to be depressed, to taste the ashes. For a while I couldn't see any hope in the future. I felt I was a complete waste of oxygen.
and my life was utterly pointless. And I just allowed myself to let go. It was a bit like I'd ripped up my life completely and had to start again.

If you do get depressed, please resist the temptation to attack yourself and tell yourself that it is all your fault that you have ended up here. You have not ended up here. You are letting go of what has ended in order to open up to the new. This is also not a time to believe you are alone in your own private hell. Reach out. Share. Give and receive love. Challenge the humiliation. Discover trust. When we don't blame or isolate ourselves, this low period passes more quickly and can have a sweetness of healing about it.

This is not to say that you will get depressed. Many people don't. But giving up hope can be tough and if it does lead you briefly into despair, you can, so to speak, take me with you there. I know what it is like. I know how it feels in the depths of Never Never Land, when we are certain that we'll never never never have what we want. You definitely will, though you may be wanting something very different by then.

The relief of giving up hope

Giving up hope is not always painful. It can even be a joyful relief, particularly when we do it at those moments when we are keyed up with excitement and worry. Perhaps we have a plan which we believe is the only possible option in the world, but which we fear could go terribly and disastrously wrong. Or perhaps we have a problem we must resolve right now or else. But what if we can't? But we have to~

Wait. Give up hope. All that stressful package of feelings melts away. We breathe a great sigh of relief. We look around and within and notice the beauty of now.

When that happens, we can get a whiff of that joy that arises in the spaces and not in the crowded reality of our plans and promises. It kind of breathes 'Me, now, how wonderful.' Thich Nhat Hanh (Thay) calls it 'Present moment, wonderful moment'.

This is the best you've been able to imagine

Whatever picture you have of the future, just let the picture dissolve. Give up hope of it ever happening. Then breathe. You don't know what you don't know, and the reality may be far better than anything you are imagining now. As my friend Clare once told me, 'Reality is always so much more interesting than the fantasy.'

The trouble with our pictures of the future is that they are based on how we are right now, in our present shape. The shape we are now is not a free and flowing one with unlimited possibilities, as it may once have been. It is the result of how we've fitted in with our partner or our work or our parents or whomever or whatever has shaped us in our lives. As we held on tight during the run-up to burnout, that shape probably got even more rigid. Even if we have separated ourselves and now seem to be free, our shape is the same.

Perhaps we are the shape of someone who serves powerful people. If we try to imagine a different future, we may imagine finding someone powerful in a different way, or someone who will see us as powerful and serve us. But this is just a different version of the old story. Our shape hasn't changed. We've just moved a notch.

This is why it is so crucial to wait long enough for us to get back into our own original flowing shape before we begin to try to look into the future. Only then can we be free and open enough to find a future that fits who we really are, and who we might be becoming.

This future we have been holding on to is the best that we have been able to imagine. Time to let go of it. We will imagine better.

Give up hope for the past

On my study wall there is a bumper sticker given to me by Abagayle, a woman who works with murderers on Death Row after having come to forgive the man who murdered her daughter. It says:

Forgiveness is giving up all hope for a better past.

This is the other half of giving up hope – letting go of all our plans for the past.

But it's not fair

As we give up hope, what often emerges besides the sadness and mourning is regret and resentment. These are two sides of the same coin.

Regret says: 'If only I'd done it differently...' If only we had done it all differently, we could still have everything we had before. We are idiots or worse.

Resentment says: 'If only someone else had done it differently.' Someone else did not save us, indeed someone else had caused this problem for us by being inhumane, abusive or worse.
Either way, *It's not fair!* It shouldn't have been this way. This shouldn't have been allowed to happen. Whoever's at fault mustn't get away with this – we or they must learn. Otherwise it can happen again. This lesson has the quality of revenge about it rather than compassion.

This is a very seductive moment. It is the moment when the sirens call us. If we keep blaming, we will not have to face the loss that we have suffered and mourn it. We will not have to give up hope of a better past.

**Forgiving others and ourselves**

When we let go of saying things should have been different, we can mourn what happened and move towards forgiveness. We take responsibility and acknowledge that we made the best choice we were able to make and perhaps everyone else did too. That is who we were then. Now that we understand the choices we made, we can do better or different next time. Luckily, we are here to tell the tale. What have we learnt?

**It is up to us to learn our own lessons only. Others will learn theirs if and when they are ready.**

Before we are able to get to this place of responsibility and forgiveness, we do need to listen to the pain and the rage, to cry and shout and scream if appropriate. That pain and rage are not for nothing. We mustn't deny them again.

A woman I met many years ago gave me this little phrase which I've never forgotten, 'Fuck you – and I put you in God's hands.' She meant: *Yes, I'm angry – but it's not my job to teach you a lesson or make you suffer. Your fate is not in my hands.*

Forgiveness definitely does not mean understanding the other person's point of view so that we don't have a right to ours, nor does it mean condoning the actions of a bully. What it does mean is that we give up on being a victim of what happened. We are choosing to step right up into the twenty-first century and be here. If we have suffered, we don't want to suffer one more minute. We would rather have freedom and love than resentment, self-pity and self-blame. It is the choice to say a Great Yes.

Maya, psychotherapist, one of whose burnout symptoms was a thyroid problem, told me about how her 'No blame' letter to her ex-partner helped in her healing.

*I wrote a letter to him and forgave him. I showed it to my friends before I gave it to him to make sure I was taking full responsibility and not blaming. And it's completely released me. I am now ready to move forward. Since then my thyroid problem started to go away. I'd been left choking on something for years, holding on to rage, resentment, blame, tears. I couldn't forgive and couldn't move on. I think I got the thyroid problem when I knew it was time to forgive but didn't want to do it. Finally, I have. But I could only come to the point of no blame when I could.*

And while we're at it, why pile up the things to forgive? I am reminded of the time my friend Robin, to my surprise, got angry at me for forgiving him. He told me, 'I don't want you to get angry and blaming, and then forgive me. Why don't you just love me and give me the benefit of the doubt to begin with?'

Why not indeed? We could say to ourselves: *Hey, I probably had a good reason for what I was doing. It just didn't work out. Or anyway it doesn't look like it has worked out. Who knows really? I just don't want to do that again.* We can do the same for others. The more we respect the message of the anger but don't blame, the less resentment, self-pity, self-attack and corrosive criticism we accumulate in our system, the less there is to forgive. It is an easier path.

It is also crucial to healing from burnout that we keep our energy to heal us in the here and now. Every one of those feelings takes more energy than we can afford to give it. If we give up hope of the future and of the past and don't accumulate any more bad feelings for a while, we are doing serious spring-cleaning that creates space and energy for joy and creativity to emerge. Once they do, we won't remember what we couldn't forgive: We wouldn't want things to be any other way.

**Forgiving life**

The place where our lack of forgiveness is held is not always in our relationship to ourselves or others, but in the feelings we have about life itself. For example, on some hardly conscious level we may have always felt that life never welcomed us, that we are like uninvited guests that have to earn our right to be here. It is like that background feeling of a dream that hangs over us when we wake. We may find that we have the same or a complementary feeling in our relationship to work or intimate partners.

Whatever happened to us while we were burning out will have brought these feelings to the fore. We may be feeling that life has betrayed us or destroyed everything we have worked to build up. We can feel like damaged goods, bereft, angry, hard done by or ashamed. These are probably very familiar feelings that come up for us whenever things go wrong in a particular way.

These feelings often started very early, when our experience of being with mother or father was our whole life. We may now have very different feelings about our parents as people, but the feelings we developed about life itself may still remain. This is why we can transform everything about how we live, yet find that our underlying feelings haven't changed at all, or we can forgive everyone in our life and still feel angry or resentful or self-pitying in some vague, unspecified way. It is these underlying feelings towards life that need healing now.
Conversations about forgiving and being forgiven by life itself can change the underlying tone of day-to-day living and help us to let go of our hopes for a better past in a very profound way. Experiment with the exercise Forgiving life under Try This ... below. You may need to do it again and again as deeper issues emerge.

A conversation with life which really changed things for me comes to mind: I asked life that tormenting question:

*Why is it that you always give me everything but the thing I really want?*

Life, like a good Jewish mother, answered a question with a question:

*Why is it that whatever I give you, you still complain?*

By the time that conversation was over, I understood just how much I take for granted whatever goes well, and focus on the next problem. I promised to do better. That promise ushered in a beautiful phase of cherishing life with my kids.

I recall it with special gratitude because they soon moved out of the house and into their new lives. During that same rather blessed period, I also went on a long-awaited trip with my friend Naomi in her camper van. Naomi was worried because it was starting to rain. I found myself saying, 'Even a rainy day is a day.'

*Nothing is unforgivable*

Another benefit of forgiveness is that it reassures us on a deep level that nothing is unforgivable. What drove us forward, against all reason, against all inner whisperings, against reality itself, towards burnout was the fear that if we stopped doing or being or achieving whatever it was, we would be worthless, wicked, selfish, bad. We would not be forgiven.

By forgiving we tell ourselves now and forever: *Nothing you do is unforgivable. There is no need ever to stop listening to yourself or to reality because the truth would be unbearable. Even when you don't listen to the truth, that too is forgivable. It's safe to be honest.*

*Keep the faith*

We cannot wait and give up hope unless we keep the faith, which means that we trust and we surrender. We are letting go of the structures which have held us safe and which are also the structures that the world around us knows and values. We are losing not only our own personal safety nets, but many of the social ones as well. This can feel very dangerous indeed. Keeping the faith makes the difference between giving up hope and hopelessness.

When burning out, we believed that if we didn't hold it together it would all fall apart – and so would we. We depended on our old ability to control everything, which we sensed was escaping our grasp. Wasn't it all up to us to make it all right? So learning to keep the faith and surrender to it is a hard one for us.

*Faith in what?*

What is the faith in? This is something I cannot tell you, except to say that probably you would not have got this far in reading this book without there being something that you truly trust in that goes beyond the normal social pictures and plans. It may be God, or your soul, or human love, or persistent hopefulness, or curiosity, or your breath and heartbeat - whatever you feel is constant when all else changes. Why not just trust yourself, the self that has brought you honourably through difficult times to where you are now, maybe feeling awful but still alive and kicking, and that will bring you through again? Whatever you trust, if it depends in any way on your doing or achieving something, It is not going to work. The exercise *If I really trusted you* under Try This...below can help you to explore what it is you trust.

Faith or trust is not constant, at least not in our feelings. It requires a decision and a discipline. If you lose the feeling, you can remind yourself of that decision, put your will behind it and show willing.

*I surrender*

At this moment in our Radical Healing, once we have found even a scent of our own inner trust, it is time to surrender to whatever is greater than our conscious control mind. We surrender to the rhythms of our own body, and also to our heart, nature, love, God, or whatever or whomever we are beginning to trust. As we surrender to our own soul, we have that feeling of coming home.

*Before we burnt out, we gave ourselves away. Now we surrender to something larger than ourselves.*
*Before, we tried to hold it all together. Now, we let ourselves be held.*
*Before, we ignored our soul's whisperings until it withdrew its support. Now, we have slowed down enough to come home to our soul and to walk in its light.*

When we want to surrender but don't know how, it can help simply to bow our heads. When I do that, my mind empties and I feel a sense of awe. It is as if something larger than my normal self is present. If, after bowing my head, I smile, I also become aware of immense gratitude. Here I am, and there is nowhere else I would rather be.
Try This: Forgiving life and/or If I really trusted you.

Forgiving life (and being forgiven too)

- Allow an image to emerge of life and your relationship to it. Imagine life is opposite you, perhaps in an empty chair. How do you feel in its presence?
- Talk to life, saying all the things you feel, including the rage and the fear and the abandonment and whatever else comes up.
- Switch places and become life, and feel what it feels like. Look back at yourself (whom I will call Self). How does Self look to you? Respond to what Self said.
- Go on with this conversation, being brutally honest, until you really acknowledge what each of you needs and are ready to forgive each other. This may take more than one conversation.
- Once you do forgive each other, allow the love to flow between you.

If I really trusted you

- Talk to yourself and say: Dear (your name), if I really honoured you this is what I would honour you for... And if I really trusted you, this is why I would trust you... You could also try, If I really honoured/trusted life, what would I honour/trust? Notice the first thought that comes to mind to finish the sentences. If it is something negative or cynical, notice that, let go and continue to surrender.
- Looking back on your life, see and acknowledge what has brought you here, what quality of your being or of life has been trustworthy all these years. Then write down what you have said. Or meditate on ‘what I trust’, choose colours and draw, letting your fingers tell you where to go. Get some words and/or an image to symbolize this essence of you or of life so that you can call them to mind in times of doubt.
- Now ask yourself: Am I willing to commit myself to hold to this trust even when I am not feeling it? If so, why?
- If you make this commitment, and you know why, don't forget when the going gets rough. The exercise The bubble under Try This... in Chapter 12 can help you to get your will aligned with this commitment.

Finally: All cannot be lost

As you are carried along, you will not know where you are going because you have stopped the control and given up hope. But keep the faith. All cannot be lost. After all, you are still there, breathing.

And each time you start to get a bit of energy back and start making your plans and feeling excited by them, and then getting worried, and then moving into action at great speed because all is not yet lost if you hurry, just remember that little mantra:

Wait. Give up Hope. Keep the Faith.
And take three enjoyable breaths.
Repeat three times for best effect.

If you wish to buy this book, please go to http://www.dinaglouberman.com/shop/