

Dr. Bruce Chalmer

Dr. Chalmer's Newsletter - Issue #2

Everything about relationships! Be kind, don't panic, and have faith.



Please tell your email app to display images--if you're not seeing my smiling face, your email isn't cooperating!

Welcome to Issue #2!

Judy* and I have been busy relocating for a few weeks to Florida. (I'm totally turning into my parents, of blessed memory, right down to using the [Auto Train](#) to get here, as they did for years.) We love living in Vermont, and have no immediate plans to change where we live all year, but...well, winters don't have the appeal they used to. So if you tune into the "[Couples Therapy in Seven Words](#)" podcast episodes we make for the next few weeks, you'll see we're not in our usual setting.

Judy retired in 2021 after 23 years in her job as education director of [our synagogue](#), so that's what freed us up to be elsewhere for longer than a week in the winter. As for me, hooray for telehealth! I'm still working my usual schedule. And thanks to the state of Florida, it was easy to become licensed as a Florida telehealth provider—all I had to do was have the Vermont board confirm to the Florida board that I have a license, and appoint a Florida resident as my agent (thanks, Alex!). So I can now work with folks in both Vermont and Florida.

I'll save some big announcements for the "News and Schmooze" section of the newsletter. But now it's time for (fanfare, please):



Today's Relationship Tip

Go to bed mad!

Wait, what? Isn't that supposed to be "Never go to bed mad?" What am I saying—that you should make sure to be mad before you go to bed?

Of course not! Who wants to go to bed mad, or in any other kind of distress, if you can avoid it?

What I *am* saying is that the usual advice, like so many such nostrums, is, let's say, limited in its usefulness. It's a lovely idea if you can pull it off. If you're in the midst of a fight and you can both calm down, work it out, and fall into each other's arms before bedtime, that's great! Make-up sex can be delightful.

But if you can't, the usual advice is not only unrealistic; it's actually toxic.

Why toxic?

Well, maybe you know this pattern: The two of you get into an argument, and it gets heated, and one of you just needs it to stop, and the other of you just needs it to be resolved. And the one who just needs it to stop tries to stop it, or leave, or otherwise shuts down. Which further freaks out the one who just needs it to be resolved, who then tries harder to get through to the one who's shutting down, which further freaks out the one who's shutting down...you get the picture.

Insisting that you have to resolve the fight before you go to bed is great if you're the one who needs resolution. But it doesn't work for the one who just needs it to stop.

Sometimes you can't solve a fight in one conversation. Sometimes you might have to go to bed mad—or at least, go to bed with that awful feeling of disconnection from your partner.

Ironically, when you give up on the idea that you should never go to bed mad, you get better at tolerating the anxiety of an unresolved issue, and so you're more capable of taking a break when you need to. And that can let you calm down enough so that the rest of your brain comes back online, and you can think again. And *that* often means that you'll actually be able to resolve the issue more quickly—maybe even before bed!

Or, as Judy suggested, you might even find a solution to the problem in your dreams.

So yes—go to bed mad, if you have to. It sucks, but it'll help you get better at working through arguments. And it might even help you sleep better in the long run!

Got some tips of your own? Want to disagree with me?

Send me a message!



What's the Big Idea?

In this section, I tell you about one of my favorite Big Ideas—at least, *I* think they're Big Ideas. These are the ideas that guide me in my work, and get me all excited. Of course, I'm a recovering nerd with frequent relapses, so what I find exciting might be, well, less so for you. But I know a lot of the folks I've worked with have found these ideas helpful, so maybe you will too.

These Big Ideas are pretty much what I write about in my books and talk about in my videos, so check them out if you want to explore these in more depth.

Today's Big Idea:

We're all multiple people.

"Oh no—now I know what he *really* thinks!"

I've heard variations on this theme a lot over the years. You're having a nasty argument, and he says, "I can't stand you. I don't think I've ever really loved you. I don't know what I was thinking when I married you."

An awful thing to hear. And you think, all those times when he said he loves you and wants to stay with you—including yesterday when you were in a therapy session working on your marriage—all those times, he was lying to you. How could you be so stupid as to believe him? And how could he be so wicked to lie to you? How can you believe anything he says anymore?

Well, maybe you're not stupid, and maybe he's not wicked. In fact, maybe he wasn't lying when he said any of those things.

How can that be? Didn't he reveal what he really thinks, deep down, when he got mad?

No! Or at least, not necessarily.

What if he loves you, and doesn't love you, and wants desperately to stay with you, and can't stand being with you, all at the same time? How could he have all those contradictory feelings simultaneously? It's almost like he'd have to be more than one person, right?

Yes! He *is* more than one person. And so are you. And so am I. The idea that we each have a single, deep-down, authentic self is a convenient illusion. It turns out we're a lot more complicated than that.

Jill Bolte Taylor is a neuroscientist who had a massive hemorrhagic stroke in her left hemisphere when she was in her thirties. It took her eight years to recover. And in 2008 she gave what became the first TED talk to go viral, called "[My Stroke of Insight](#)." As of this writing it's been viewed over 28 million times. She followed it up with a [book](#) with the same title. Her experience of living without left-hemisphere functions, and then gradually regaining them, taught her a lot about how complex our brains are, and how that complexity plays out in our behavior and personalities.

Then a couple years ago she published another book, called [Whole Brain Living: The Anatomy of Choice and the Four Characters that Drive Our Life](#). As the subtitle indicates, she posits that we're all (at least) four different people, based on four different neuroanatomical structures we all have.

Each of the four has important functions, and they're all quite different from each other. In particular, the one Dr. Taylor calls "Character 2" is the one charged with the responsibility of freaking the f*** out when it perceives a possible threat. That's the one that takes over when you're in the middle of a nasty fight. That's the one that was in charge when he said those horrible things. He meant them when he said them—or I should say, his Character 2 meant them when he said them.

But the other characters are every bit as real! His Character 1 could be thinking about the practical implications of staying together or splitting up, while his Character 3 is just wanting to have sex with you, and his Character 4 is feeling totally bonded with you. All at the same time.

And, of course, your own four Characters are reacting to all of this in real time, in similarly diverse ways. You've said a bunch of contradictory things too.

So what? What good does it do to recognize that we're all multiple people? And how are you supposed to know what's real, if there are all those competing stories?

Well, when you recognize that you and me and all of us are bundles of contradictions, you can relax a bit. You still need to figure out what to do in any given situation, but you don't have to "get to the bottom" of everything and resolve all the complexities—because you can't. The best you can do is have faith that this whole living business is, surprisingly, doable, even with all the uncertainties.

That idea of faith, of course, is a Big Idea in itself. Stay tuned to this station!

Do you have a Big Idea? Or a Big Question? (Or even little ideas or questions?)

Send me a message!

Which is a nice segue to:



Today's Big Question

I got an email from a subscriber I'll call Emily.** She writes,

"I'm wondering if a healthy relationship that is both stable and intimate can be achieved when living apart. I believe the term may be 'together apart'. Perhaps more typical prior to ever living together, but what about if you've been living together but would feel much more comfortable resuming living separately? I'm so curious what your thoughts are on this."

Thanks for the question, Emily!

If you google "Living Apart Together," you'll find a lot on this—it's a common enough topic that it goes by its initials, "LAT."

Readers, what are your thoughts on this? I'd especially like to hear from folks who have some experience of it, or know people who are doing it. We'll talk about it in the next newsletter.

**See my section on confidentiality in [Issue 1](#). In brief, I won't use real names or identifying details unless I have your explicit permission, and even then I won't use your actual name if you're a former or current client of mine.

Send me a message!



News & Schmooze

Book news: The Big News is that the [Kindle version of *It's Not About Communication!*](#) is launching on January 15. I'm sending this out on Friday 1/13, so it's the day after tomorrow as I write this—and maybe by the time you're reading this, it's already Sunday. If you feel like parting with \$2.99, you can get it immediately, and I (ahem) recommend it highly!

I probably shouldn't tell you this, but here's yet another premium you get for signing up for this newsletter. Pretty soon (how's that for specificity) I'm going to do a 99-cent special for the Kindle version. I'm not being cagey about the timing—I actually don't know yet how long it takes Amazon to start the 99-cent promotion thing, and I won't be able to set it up until the actual release date. I think \$2.99 is already a bargain, but if you'd like to save a couple bucks you can wait for the 99-cent promotion. I'll let you know when I know the start date.

The idea of the promotion, by the way, is to get a lot of people to buy the book on the same day, so it becomes a best seller that day in one or more of its categories. So when I let you know about it, I'll be asking that you buy it on a particular day. Chutzpah, right? But hey—it's a good book!

And don't forget the [paperback](#) and [audiobook](#) versions, already available. Tell your friends!

Podcast news: We just recorded a delightful interview with Nicole Quallen, an attorney in North Carolina who specializes in collaborative divorce. We titled the episode, "Does Divorce Have to Be Horrible?" Spoiler alert—the whole idea of collaborative divorce is, no, it doesn't have to be horrible. [Tune in](#) and see what you think.

We've got a bunch of guests lined up for the next month or so. As always, if you have ideas for guests (including yourself) or topics you'd like us to include, [drop me a line](#).

That's all for now—bye!

--Bruce

[Send me a message!](#)

P.S. If someone forwarded you this message (feel free, by the way), and you'd like to subscribe yourself, [go to my website](#) and watch the magic box appear that says "Click here to subscribe to Dr. Chalmer's Newsletter!" And don't forget to look for the confirmation email--that's an anti-spam thing, which is why I do it. I'd love to welcome you on board!

*That's my wife and podcast co-host, Judy Alexander. If you haven't checked out our ["Couples Therapy in Seven Words" podcast](#), you don't know what you're missing!



Please take a moment to make sure these emails actually make it into your inbox! The easiest way (at least for those of us in Google-land) is just to add me to your contacts.

[Here's a link](#) that tells you how to do it for various email services. Please let me in--it's lonely in the Spam or Promotions folder!

[Newsletter Archive - Click Here for Past Issues](#)

Helpful Links



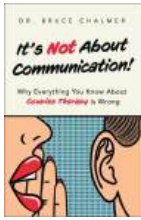
Podcast

Couples Therapy in Seven Words



Website

Dr. Chalmer's website:
Books, couples therapy practice, blog



It's Not About Communication!

Why Everything You Know About Couples Therapy is Wrong



Reigniting the Spark

Why Stable Relationships Lose Intimacy, and How to Get It Back

Dr. Bruce Chalmer

South Burlington
United States of America

You received this email because you signed up
for this newsletter.

[Unsubscribe](#)

