

Leader Power

You can heal and correct abuse.



by Judith Barr

POWER IS LIKE FIRE, lightning, wind, ocean—like life itself—a raw, vibrant force of nature. It has the potential for great harm and the possibility for magnificent good. Each of us chooses how we will use the power of our own life energy.

Every form of power can be used well or misused. The *law* has been used to manipulate as well as to serve justice. Parenthood has been a means of captivity, and it has nourished souls, helping them grow into fullness. Sexuality has been a weapon to rape and dominate, a substitute for unmet childhood bonding and physical touch, and an exquisite sacred expression of love and union.

Money has been used to feed, clothe, house, nurture, and fulfill positive potential; and it has been used to grab, hoard, trick, steal, sabotage, and destroy. *Work* has been used to produce, engage people's gifts, experience collaboration, create good in our world; and it has been used to take advantage of people, make slaves of them, and suck the life out of them for someone's personal gain.

The misuse and abuse of power is rampant—sometimes under the guise of goodness, sometimes raw and unmasked. It's right out in the light of day. If we are willing to see it, we can utilize it for healing.

Too often we try to change things and wonder why it doesn't last. But to recover, change must occur within us. It must take place from the inside out.

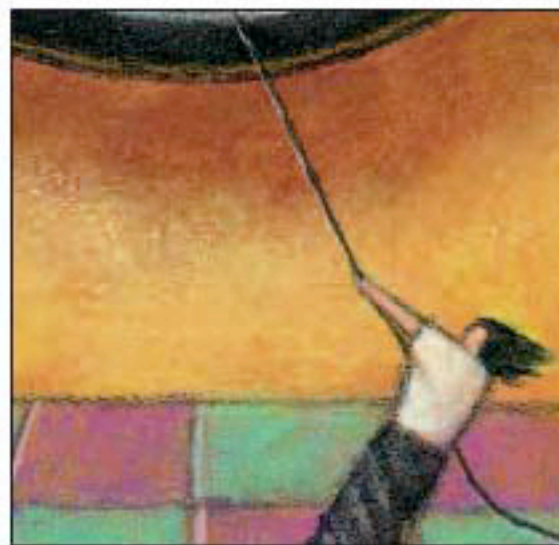
In the realm of power, removing an abusive leader is a temporary fix. Soon another officer will need to be removed because of another abuse of power. But if leaders do their own inner work with their relationship with power, the culture will be transformed from the inside out.

Why the Abuse?

How do people get to the point of misusing and abusing their power? As children we have painful or traumatic experiences which, in our vulnerable

state, are too much to bear. To protect ourselves, we create defenses, and sometimes these are visibly abusive despite our protective intention. With time, our defenses harden, eventually disconnect from their original intention, and take on a life of their own. Then abuse is more serious, unconscious, and destructive. A little boy is hurt by his mother's cold, controlling nature. He is afraid to strike out, so he closes his heart to protect himself and control the pain. He has no idea it may trigger his mother to be more domineering; or that it will make him cold and controlling with other people.

In the process of painful experience, children make "early decisions" about themselves, others, and life. Most of these decisions are unconscious, mean-



ing they drive our lives without our awareness. Imagine a leader who as a child decided: "While I'm little, you make the decision; when I'm big, I'll make the decisions." "Now you make the rules; someday you'll follow my rules." "You may have the power now; when I grow up, I'll have all the power." We may have just discovered early decisions of a corporate executive, Supreme Court Justice, legislator, president, prime minister, or dictator.

Early decisions are a defense against the pain from long ago. They cause us to re-create similar experiences. We experience pain; we defend against the pain; in the experience, we make decisions; we then act based, not on the truth of what exists in the moment, but on these early decisions. When life threatens to pierce the defenses, abuse becomes the initial or

backup defense system.

Healing the Abuse

When we see a manager abusing an employee, at the root, we are seeing the rage and defense of a small child, erupting into the here and now.

All of us adults are using power in the current day to defend our young self or child within from feeling rage, hurt, fear, loss; from feeling shame and humiliation; from feeling rejected, bad, unwanted, unlovable, alone; from feeling helpless and powerless. *Until we do our own inner work with power, we are creating chaos in the outer world in an attempt to avoid the chaos inside us.*

Healing needs to happen at the root. A person can count to 10, breathe, take a walk, write in a journal, speak with someone. But these options only help *manage* the abuse. If you don't *heal the root*, rage will erupt again—perhaps even stronger because it's been held back and pushed down for so long.

We cannot heal alone. We can't see our own blind spots. Healing to the root needs to be done with a qualified coach who sees clearly, knows the challenges, and does his or her own healing work.

Although your work will be unique, some common threads include:

- **Find the root of the abuse in your life.** The root is not "here and now."
- **Build your capacity to feel the feelings beneath the abuse.** This will help you dissolve the abuse (not just manage it). Repressing feelings creates abuse of power. Acting out feelings is destructive, too.
- **Be intrigued by your shadow**—the dark, unconscious internal parts that are home to your wounds, weaknesses, gifts, and strengths. Be compassionate as you meet and face yourself. If you ignore your shadow, it will haunt you and drive your life without your even realizing it, inevitably creating the misuse of power in its wake.
- **Commit to your healing.** Other people and aspects of your own self may try to seduce you into stopping, giving up, or undermining the process. Stand watch over your healing.

How will you use your power as a leader? Great leaders know how to use power wisely. To be a great leader, you must heal your relationship with power from the inside out and consistently observe how you use your power. **LE**

Judith Barr is the author of *Power Abused, Power Healed*. Email JudithBarr@PowerAbusedPowerHealed.com or visit www.PowerAbusedPowerHealed.com.

ACTION: Use power wisely.