

Painting pictures

1. Double introvert - the castle

Imagine a beautiful castle. A long path leads to the castle and then encircles it. Many years ago, it was reputed to contain some of the finest treasures in the country. A family lived there happily and, on certain days, the gates to the estate and castle were thrown open and visitors were shown around so that they too could enjoy the beautiful treasures. A local man from the village was employed as the tour guide.



Then something went wrong. No-one knows quite what happened. Word got out that there had been a dispute; that the treasures had been taken away. Visitor days were stopped and when some of the locals went to investigate, instead of a friendly welcome, they were met by a guard on duty.



The beautiful castle is the Melancholic, full of priceless treasures. So much depends on the Phlegmatic and his response to the Melancholic. If he feels confident with the Melancholic then he will be the tour guide, happily letting people in and even taking out those treasures to share with people in exhibitions around the country. The Phlegmatic decides. He will either close the place down or make it available for everyone to enjoy. Just like the path that runs around the castle, so he wraps himself around the Melancholic, standing just at the point where the path leading

to the castle joins the circular path. He exercises ultimate control.

Imagine, one day, that word gets around that there had been a misunderstanding and that the treasures are in the castle – and have been all the time. The sentry can now get rid of his guard's uniform and get back to doing what he does best – making the treasures available to all.

The key in our allegory is what the Melancholic feels about himself and how the Phlegmatic responds to that. If the Melancholic feels there is nothing of value within then he will retreat and close down. The Phlegmatic responds by taking control. That control can take a number of forms. Sometimes a cutting humour is his first choice of weapon, for others, it can be a cruel negativity. The Phlegmatic can be a chameleon and adjust to his environment so he can be what he thinks people want him to – rather like the sentry becoming a clown and doing tricks on the front lawn to prevent people from getting near the castle.



A double introvert often believes that there is something fundamentally wrong with him because he hasn't got an extrovert temperament. He feels emotionally disabled. When he compares himself, always unfavourably, with those around him, he feels unable to 'keep up.'



He might strive but, he concludes, he will never be good enough. So he settles himself into a different position – just below the line of 'normality'. It is easy to become defensive, anti-establishment and looking to 'being different' for significance. The answer is for him to recognise that he has an abundance of treasure. He has the sensitivity of the Melancholic and the tenderness of the Phlegmatic. His double dose of quality means he is

inferior to no-one. His Phlegmatic has all the qualities of an introvert but can do the amazing thing of doubling as an extrovert when he needs to. The Phlegmatic can come across like a Choleric in the work situation and a Sanguine in leisure times. What more can he want?

2. The drawbridge



Moats encircled castles as a means of defence. A drawbridge provided access across the moat but also enabled those inside the castle to deny access to an enemy.

We are called to give ourselves away. If we feel threatened or under attack, it is all too easy to 'close down' by lifting the drawbridge. This has the effect of not only keeping others out but keeping us in. If we use our Melancholic to withdraw or our Phlegmatic to protect, the bridge has gone up. When we accept that we are loved then there is no need to keep the bridge up. Are we using our particular temperaments to reach out to others or to keep ourselves in?

3. The Blowhole

A blowhole forms when rock is eroded and a tunnel cut into the rock with an outlet at the top. A wave enters the tunnel, compressing the air. At a certain point of compression, the air is thrust through the outlet, carrying spray with it high into the air. There is often a loud 'oomph' as the air is forced out.

The blowhole provides a good illustration of what happens to our emotions when feelings come up from the introvert and are not properly expressed. Pressure builds, the emotions cannot go back down into the introvert because 'the wave is still coming in' and suddenly they spill out with spectacular results. If we don't properly process what goes on within our introvert, then those emotions will be forced out through the extrovert in ways that are not always constructive!



4. The Sink Hole



The photo is of a sinkhole on a sloping field above the east side of the bay in Trevone, Cornwall. It is a collapsed sea cave. There is no fencing so it is not advisable to wander around in the dark!

The sinkhole provides an illustration of a collapsed Phlegmatic. If strength is not built into the Phlegmatic by making good choices, then there is an inner weakness at his core and when he is under sufficient pressure, he will collapse. Anyone

getting too close will be in danger of getting dragged down into his collapse.

5. The balloons



Think of each human being as having a certain amount of energy or life. If some of that life is squeezed out of one part of who you are, it will find its way to another – rather like the squeezing of a balloon. We will apply that to a Choleric Phlegmatic. When faced with an uncomfortable challenge, the Phlegmatic might take the easy route and go into retreat. The circle shrinks and the air is squeezed into the Choleric. The capacity of the Phlegmatic to connect, to empathise and to engage, is lost - and the Choleric is enlarged. The traits of the Choleric become more pronounced and potentially overbearing. This makes for difficult relationships.



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6. The Phlegmatic wave

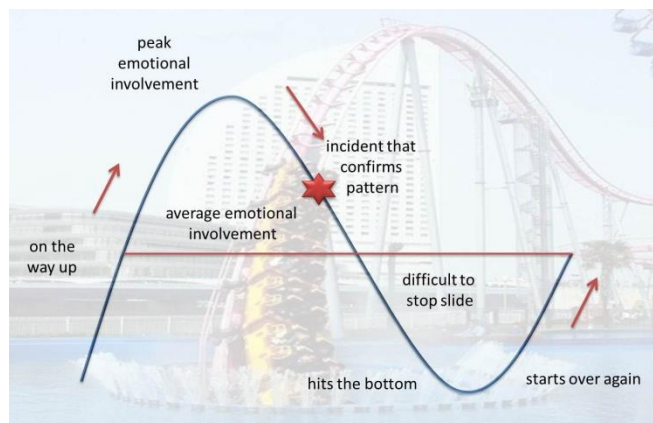
The emotions of the Phlegmatic rise and fall. This is true of all the temperaments, but it can be helpful to understand the particular pattern of the Phlegmatic. It follows a gentle but clearly marked wave pattern. This is how it works. The Phlegmatic has realised that he needs to 'up his game' and get more involved. This may be in response to a particular challenge – e.g. a friend complaining about his lack of engagement or children needing to see more of their father. So, he makes the effort, puts aside personal discomfort and gives himself away more than usual. This burst of energy can last a while, peaks – and then drops away. Why does it drop away? Because the level of involvement is beyond the average level. The Phlegmatic feels he

has a limited supply of emotional energy and so he cannot be expected to overextend himself for any length of time. Soon the level of involvement drops, and we are on a downward slide. He is heading for familiar territory – the place where he feels safe. Initially, this change may well be imperceptible – even to the Phlegmatic himself. He just doesn't feel quite so good. A momentum has been established and he is now in emotional decline – beneath the average – heading for the depths. This is when people who care about him start to complain - so he feels bad and goes down even further. Eventually, he realises he cannot go on like this, so he makes the effort – and starts climbing again.

When he is on the way down the wave, he is particularly vulnerable. A negative incident has the potential to affect him disproportionately. He can easily be made to feel guilty or anxious. The reason is that he has withdrawn emotionally, and it is in that emotional vacuum that those negatives breed. He operates at his best when he is giving himself away and engaging at good levels. Once something negative happens it is all too easy to attribute his guilt or anxiety to that incident, whereas it is the emotional

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pattern working away beneath the surface that is the stronger influence. Understanding that gives him the opportunity to take responsibility for his levels of emotional engagement. This takes us to the heart of the issue. If a Phlegmatic is going to minimise the effect of that emotional wave, then he has to decide to increase his emotional involvement in a sustained and consistent way. It doesn't mean that he is on a heightened state of alert all his waking hours, but it does mean he is always emotionally available and ready for appropriate engagement. This will push up his average level of emotional involvement and thereby minimise the wave effect.

7. The Melancholic Spiral

The Melancholic's equivalent of the Phlegmatic's wave pattern is the spiral. A thought enters the Melancholic's mind and, especially if he is struggling with low self-worth, that thought becomes weighted negatively. He will have a conversation within himself and, unless someone is able to put in a positive thought, he will quickly find himself on a downward spiral.

The key is for the Melancholic to recognise what is happening right at the beginning of the process and to arrest the negative thinking before it gets hold. If it is allowed to continue it is like sliding down very slippery bannisters!

