

Love Broke Through

A friend described how growing up in his family, culture, and situation left him feeling alone and without a deep feeling of being cherished. This was most clear when he played with his dog. When they play tug and catch with his dog is so engaged, funny, and kind that he has to stop to kiss and hug the dog and tell him how much he loves him through-out the play.

The reasons he ended up feeling alone and not cherished are complicated and much more than we could detail here. It seems he was neglected, and so deprived of the attention, affection, appreciation, and affirmation children need to really thrive and prosper in so many ways. He explains it as a dark cloud that hung over his family as he grew up. This cloud was over his mother and father and their families growing up too, and he carried it on to his wife, children, and others.

Another friend was actively abused by being berated, slapped around, and called ugly names. many others had it much worse suffering serious injuries through physical, mental, sexual, and other abuses. Yet this his abuse was enough to have him pursue a degree in psychology to try and understand and heal his dysfunction. Unfortunately working his way through collage became overwhelming and he had a nervous breakdown and had to move back in with his abusive parents. He now barely gets by in many ways, and is often lost in depression for days at a time.

There are countless ways that neglect and abuse are played out. The important question here is, was there neglect or abuse in your upbringing that left you feeling unloved or alone? Also you may be suffering and not even be aware it, as although it may have been horrific, it may have been so commonplace that you came to believe it was normal. If you grew up in a war zone or emotional desert you may think everyone does, so why even complain or try to make changes?

The rules of don't talk, trust, or feel, and don't look at, listen to, or heal dysfunction somehow infect dysfunctional families, cultures, and societies, so that denial holds it all together in a system that does actually function, but in sick and twisted ways. Unconsciously we want to go back and fix the problems, but are doomed to pick the people and situations least likely to achieve our unconscious desires, unless we break those rules to find safe and sane people to help us work through the issues to effect real changes and healing.

A friend who was witness to and the subject of anger, fighting, and negativity in her family said that no one in the family could talk about what was going on, so the truth of her heart and gut was lost. It was as if there were hands around her throat choking her off to her truth. It is a clear image of an even bigger problem often expressed of pain and suffering causing us to lose touch with our bodies, and instead moving it into a place in the back of our minds where we can avoid it.

The problem is we don't feel much anymore. Our bodies, feelings, emotions, and truth become more of an idea than an experience. People often share that they haven't cried for years, perhaps decades. As if that wasn't bad enough, we also lose connection with our inner child, which you could say is our heart, and all the youthful excitement, joy, and love children so easily express. Take a moment now to realize how free most children are to feel, and express those feelings.

Think of a playground or children's party and you may imagine them squealing with delight, laughing, and running around like crazy. If someone gets hurt they are crying or sobbing until they get a band aid and a kiss,

and they are off again into the pandemonium. Children are very much in the moment and exhibit an exuberance and energy few carry into adulthood, yet may be accessed if we can find the doorway.

Finding that doorway, and the keys to unlocking it is a personal effort. It starts with thinking of what our inner child enjoys. We then begin to look for those things, whether they are objects or experiences. For many toys and games help bring back the fun and play of good times as youngsters. Many grown-ups collect the ones that they enjoyed as kids. Most drug and department stores have a section for games and toys, and visits to toy stores often end with many treasures found.

The opportunities to play with these treasures may not present itself often, but just knowing they are on a shelf is comforting. Some folks are bold enough to leave them out where they can be seen often, or take them out on occasions where other kids or grown up kids can play with them. Often the most prized possessions stay home or are somewhat guarded so they don't get lost or broken. The possibilities are endless, but a look at some friend's shelves, closets, garages, cars, and boxes found the following items you may find inspiring.

Dolls, playing cards, stuffed animals and others, silly string, toy cars, trucks, boats, airplanes, and trains, balloons, necklaces, beads, pinwheels, jump ropes, kazoos, yo-yos, kaleidoscopes, paddle balls, puzzle, sticker, comic, and coloring books, crayons, markers, paints, playdough, bubble wands, sidewalk chalk, kites, bicycles, frisbees, musical instruments, baseball mitts, funny glasses, and all kinds of balls, capes, tiaras, crowns, swords, and costumes. And for the older "kids"; Barbies, army men, tops, Lego, Lincoln Log, and Erector sets, slinkys, and ectha sketches.

Most of this list was compiled from one persons collection. He started with model cars and thanks to a twice a year retreat that on family dynamics and inner child was able to expand and share his youthful joy. He brings most of his playthings and leaves them out on the patio for all to enjoy through-out the weekend. On Saturday night there is usually a wonderful and wild inner child experience and sharing meeting with many boxes of stuffed animals, toys, games, and goodies poured out on the floor for all the adult children to play with.

Why is this so important, and so fulfilling and healing for many people? Erik Erikson's stages of development tells us that a healthy child learns trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and later love, concern for others, and wisdom. The flip side is mistrust, shame and doubt, guilt, inferiority, role confusion, and later isolation, stagnation, and despair. We may miss out on certain stages, or have the whole process arrested if the loss is too great.

The downside is obviously not a place we would want to go, but should we fail to resolve any stage we may suffer the consequences the rest of our lives. The saying "It's never too late to have a happy childhood" gives us great hope and comfort as we find it is possible to see where we got stuck and work to find help, healing, and resolution later in life. This has been our experience and what we hope to convey here for anyone feeling lost and alone in their journey.

This arrested development and the search for resolution led the "Adult Children of Alcoholics and Dysfunctional Families" to branch off from the successful twelve step alcoholics anonymous program and start their own. This program delves deeply into the family dynamics of inner child, parent, and Higher Power that we find so enlightening and healing. Meetings, step studies, retreats, as well as excellent books, sponsorship, and fellowship help these "adult children" work through issues to at last find wholeness and happiness. We certainly

don't insist this is the only workable path, as we recommend good counseling and support outside of the program, but for us, it has been a powerful and essential part of our lives.

We find access to inner child is access to not only our feeling and emotional side as well as all the joy, excitement, and sorrow that entails (more about sorrow further on), but access to another crucial aspect of a full and complete life that is a Higher Power. We often use the term Higher Power, as it carries less baggage as the more religious word God. Whether you prefer Great Spirit, Eternal One, God, or simply, The Force the result is the same, and that is access to all the power, presence, and wisdom of creation.

Why is inner child the door to Higher Power? Because many of us believe this energy emanates from our center and source, from a feeling and gut level that is preverbal and primordial from long before humans and cognition. We can think about this power and presence endlessly and not have a real experience of it until we let go of thinking and feel it deeply from our heart and gut. Many of us feel our inner child is our heart, but it is kind of funny when we realize this child started at a gut level as well in the womb.

How can we express the nature of the infinite to you, and in particular those who have a negative view of a Higher Power due to parental and other extreme neglect, abuses, and injustices? It's not easy. It can take a long time and a lot of hard work to turn it around, but it is time and energy well spent. We mention parental and other influences growing because these become our view of the world and Higher Power, for better or worse. Is it a safe and benevolent world, or a dark and frightening place of great dangers? This view is also often deeply ingrained within us.

Perhaps the best place to begin this journey is with nature. When we look to nature we see it is infinite as well. First there are all the stars, planets, and other "heavenly bodies" engaged in an intricate seemingly infinite dance across the universe in perfect mechanical order like a gigantic Swiss watch. Life is similarly infinitely tenacious, abundant, diverse, and beautiful as it clings to every possible crack and crevice across the earth, oceans, and skies. Life can easily be considered a noun and a verb (a thing and an action) as it is evident and active across the world and almost certainly across the cosmos.

Yet how do we create and maintain an intimate loving relationship with our Higher Power, particularly if the relationship has been troubled? Going to nature and spending quiet time in prayer and meditation may find what many wise persons have found: Frank Lloyd Wright said; "Nature is my manifestation of God. I go to nature everyday for inspiration." Also; "I believe in God, only I spell it nature." Albert Einstein said; "Look deep into nature, and you will understand everything better." Martin Luther said; "God writes the gospel... on trees and flowers and clouds and stars." Ralph Waldo Emerson said; "The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship." Brigham Young said; "Nature is the glass reflecting God, as the sun is reflected by the sea." Thomas Browne said; "Nature is the art of God."

For those who have an adverse attitude towards the great outdoors or a fear of wild places perhaps journaling may be helpful. Here you may speak as if with your very best lifelong friend, for who would know us better than the one who knows everything we ever did as well as our every thought, idea, opinion, and belief however divine or evil, yet loves us enough to keep the sun shining, rain falling, and seasons changing as if for our own personal benefit. Add to this keeping our bodies working to balance, digest food, pass waste, and hundreds of other functions non-stop for a lifetime. Then if we consider all the great music, movies, meals, holidays, parties, events, and so on we have been privileged to experienced and the blessings become obvious.

Compassion is also a breakthrough, a breakthrough to love. This is compassion for ourselves and others to really feel the pain and suffering, grieve the losses, comfort those sick and wounded physically, spiritually, mentally, economically, environmentally, and other ways from wars, famines, disasters, diseases, oppression, exploitation, illness, old age, and other maladies.

It's often easy to laugh together. Harder to play together, and harder still to work together on difficult issues. But to cry together and for each other takes real compassion.

It is a breakthrough. Through the walls we built to protect ourselves. Through the distances we put between us to protect ourselves. Through the biases and prejudices we've come to believe in to protect ourselves. Why? It is the hero's journey back to responsibility, community, source and center, inner child, and our essential, true self.

We must also understand and accept all our "persons" of our personality good and bad to become our best selves. We get in touch with our inner magician, artist, warrior, hero, king or queen, and so on. On the flip side our witch or warlock, spoiler, mercenary, and super villain. Also our inner mother or father, brother or sister, aunt or uncle, and grandparent?

Is it a hard life with much disease, dysfunction, and insanity? Growing up did we come to believe in the spoken or unspoken rules of don't talk, trust, and feel, don't look, listen, or heal? Prince, Michael Jackson, Robin Williams, and Whitney Houston probably would say yes if they were here to share their pain with us.

Life is sunshine and roses but also darkness, storms, and thorns. A full life embraces it all. It is very easy to get scared, frustrated, angry, and depressed. But love goes further. We must accept what is. Face the situations with complete focus and clarity to understand, forgive, and find wisdom and transformation. A spiritual perspective and understanding is also necessary to find wisdom and transformation and effect real and lasting changes.

Unfortunately the "bomb" has already gone off in many places around the world, and many worst-case scenarios are already happening. Yet there is hope, healing, and happiness if we seek out truly helpful people and situations to guide and support us. We may also follow a spiritual path back to our center and source, maker and master.

PS: Sympathy is feelings of sorrow, caring, or pity for another's troubles, grief, and misfortune. Compassion is very similar as we have sensitivity and understanding of others plight, but along with a strong desire to alleviate their suffering. Empathy takes it to the next level where we actually feel the pain that others feel. This ability can add energy to our efforts but if their suffering is great we can become overwhelmed, burn out, and withdraw.

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