

## **Befriending Our Problems**

*Crisis is the dangerous breaking of glass that opens locked windows of opportunity that require perceptiveness and courage to move through, with care.*

~ Tom Atlee, Co-Intelligence Institute

For many of us, worries about the economic and political scene (e.g., the stock market, healthcare and the federal deficit) and fear of an unknown future have our blood pressure rising along with our credit card debt. Fear has become a powerful tool for all sides to wield in the public debate, while entrenched polarization ensures that nothing moves forward.

At the same time, more and more people are seeking to use pharmaceuticals to treat their depression, thinking that drugs are the answer to maintaining functionality, while avoiding the cause and ignoring the signal that something is wrong.

Clearly, when we look out at the world, *what appears to be broken and needs to be fixed is everywhere*. There is an intersection between our own psychological and spiritual health and the actual landscape of our lives.

Tom Atlee of the Co-Intelligence Institute has observed that "... evolution, like water behind a dam, knows where all the cracks are, and is working on them right now with increasing intensity."

Could it be that something new is trying to happen, seeking the transformation of the Whole? Might our out-of-balance world be due to increased spiritual energy seeking to awaken the values of the heart—compassion, generosity, forgiveness, and a desire to live in harmony with others?

I propose that the only way forward through this minefield is to *befriend our problems as the messengers that they are*, highlighting the empty, loveless, or meaningless places in our lives that thirst for something meaningful and real.

When we anxiously hold onto the way things were—and want no disruptions in our lives—we avoid finding answers since the current status quo is closely tied to the malaise on the planet.

I remember being surprised years ago when I read *Care of the Soul* by Thomas Moore. He titled one of the chapters "The Gift of Depression." I had to think about that.

What if we learned to suffer more effectively? Rather than failing to notice the opportunities and lessons our challenges offer, we could see the problem

and the solution as two sides of the same coin.

In fact, today's suffering could become tomorrow's happiness. Who would you be today if it weren't for your suffering? Think back. Wasn't there a jewel of awareness and growth offered in almost every tribulation?

Regardless of whether society is ready to transform, individuals who bring their lives into balance and harmony—restoring the love, hope, and unity that is their birthright—actually aid the possibilities for change in the wider world.

We could, as Tom Atlee suggests, “use our differences and our challenges creatively, not simply as problems to avoid or solve, but as signs of new life pushing to emerge—and as invitations into a new, more whole tomorrow.”

In the next few years, remember that these invitations will be of the utmost importance. Profound changes are ahead; whether we move forward gracefully, or kick and scream, depends on our ability to see problems as friends. We can let go of the past and accept the opportunity offered by crisis rather than fear the unknown.

## **Step Up to the Mirror and Own the Love**

*Happiness is looking at a mirror and liking what you see.*

~ Anonymous

Clients and friends who know about my relationship with my husband, Chuck, often ask me how I got so lucky. It is true that I am blessed with a partner who is affectionate, generous, and deeply spiritual, but I always tell them, “Relationships are not so much about the other person as they are about you.”

How can that be? Aren't you looking for the “right mate”? Isn't it important to find the “right one”? In my experience, the issue is not *finding* the right mate; that will happen naturally. It is more important to *be* the right mate.

All relationships begin and end with you. If you are not open to sharing yourself honestly and openly, and if you question whether you are worthy of love, there is no one who will ever be able to storm the walls or convince you to receive the love they offer. Begin the deep work of erasing all the critical voices from past relationships (e.g., parents, teachers, or intimates). Love and accept yourself just as you are—imperfect, but still growing.

After all, how can you expect someone else to love you if you can't love yourself? When your relationship with yourself is healthy, you are able to look upon another person with acceptance for their human frailties and

discover the unique qualities that make them attractive—or at least interesting—rather than troubling.

When you struggle with unloved parts of yourself, it is easy to project them onto others. Our relationships can be thought of as mirrors on which we project our unhealed wounds. We may not be aware we are doing it, so we blame the other person for what we see in them while they are simply reflecting the unhealed part of ourselves.

When challenges arise due to differing points of view, rather than blaming the other person, I suggest you “step up to the mirror” presented by the person with whom you disagree.

Discuss the situation with the other person as if you were talking to a different part of yourself, and use the same love and acceptance you would give to yourself. Open to discovering what the other person is feeling; you may be surprised how quickly tension is defused and solutions appear. In this way, you will “own the love.”

“Step up to the mirror” in your past and present, whether that is easy or challenging. “Own the love” by honor yourself and accepting the differences.

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