

Give Peace A Chance

March 10, 2013

If you've heard me speak here before, you'll probably remember the occasional reference to my mother. If you haven't, I can sum up 50 years by saying we've had a difficult relationship in part because I've never felt as though I could trust her with my heart. I've had girlfriends over the years who talk about sharing their deepest secrets and desires with their mothers, even just spending time together, and I've always felt that I was on the outside looking in. My mom and I weren't like that, especially when I was a teenager and young woman. I didn't feel safe from criticism and judgment whenever I had questions about who I was or about sex, boys, my body, or how to perceive others and approach life. Some days her responses were kind and compassionate and other times fiercely over-reactive and damning. She was a teacher, and maybe she saw teaching opportunities in every moment.

One time in particular I remember happened when I was about 25 years old. I was living in New York City working as a computer animator, and pursuing a dream to speak Russian so I could read the great Russian authors in the original language. In 1987 I won a scholarship to go to Moscow and participate in a 4-week long intensive language study; room and board and tuition were all included. I needed only to come up with about \$2,000 for airfare. Because I was working at a production company, I had other connections in the industry and was fortunate enough to arrange work for an HBO film crew who was following the singer Billy Joel on his Bridge Tour in Russia. When my language study was completed I'd be able to simply step over to some production assistant work in Moscow and then travel with the crew to Petersburg before heading home to New York. The PA work was very well paid and my flight home was covered by the production company, so I'd actually *make* money on this 8-week trip.

I didn't have the \$2000 for the flight over, but I'd earn it by the time I got home so I decided to ask my mother for a short-term loan. She refused, telling me I shouldn't have made plans or signed up for a scholarship application if I wasn't prepared in all ways to accept it on my own. This was one of her "teachable moments." Of course I was quite upset by this, that she couldn't see the logic in my payment plan (with interest) and that she was more concerned about making a point than helping her daughter take a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.*

I swore to myself that I would never, ever ask her for anything, ever again. And I kept that promise to myself for twenty-five years.

Which is what made a recent interaction with her so surprising. My mother made an offer to purchase something very expensive for me (she was doing the same for all her children), which I believed I wouldn't use so I turned it down. Later I realized I *could* use what she'd offered, and with some trepidation asked if she might spend that money on me after all. She went out of her way to accommodate me... only after it was purchased once again I realized that I *couldn't* use it. I was so horrified at asking her to return this item and because I've always been a bit of a coward

around her, I told her so in an email. She was so gracious about the whole interaction and though I was extremely apologetic about all the extra work and expense my flip-flopping caused her, she repeatedly calmed my fears.

I'm sure my mother never knew my silent oath never to ask her for anything ever again, so when -- 25 years after the oath -- I had to ask her *three times* for help, it was truly my own issue to overcome.

What's the moral of this story?

Our choices define us and every relationship we have.

All those years I focused on what she'd refused me. I was really inflicting on myself a remoteness from my mother. I still don't agree with her decision to teach me a lesson about finances all those years ago, but I probably lost out on more than I gained (in pride). Not only did I not ask her for anything all those years, but I almost never let her give anything to me except for birthday or Christmas gifts.

Today my mother is not much different than the teacher of yore; she still says some things that make me ask myself "Did you really just say that out loud?" She'll still make critical comments or turn difficulties into lessons. But *I'm* different now in my relationship with her because I changed my mind. I took a deep breath, faced my fears and my childish vows, and asked her for help anyway. And she showed up with compassion and understanding.

Changing your mind takes courage, no doubt about it, especially when it comes to letting someone in whom you've locked outside long ago. The reasoning at the time may be completely justified, but sustaining the lock by keeping the reasons alive often leaves us missing out on opportunities to mend hearts and feelings.

It also takes courage to let go of unhealthy relationships. It isn't always the right decision to continue trying to fix a relationship that is broken or abusive.

In the past few months I consciously ended a budding friendship, not simply by letting it atrophy, but by explaining to the person that our friendship was over. For me this took as much courage as asking my mother for help because I don't want people to dislike me or be mad at me. Before I recovered my inherent self-esteem I used to make life choices based on who was going to be less mad at me!

It may not always be correct or safe to open a closed door or end an acquaintance, but it *is* always the right decision to take the measure of a person here in the present.

I could have stuck to my twentieth-five year old decision never to ask my mother for anything -- but I wouldn't have gotten the amazing gift of what feels like redemption. Not that *she* redeemed me, but that I redeemed myself. It's possible now for me to look back at all those other self-destructive decisions with a lot more compassion.

Whether you choose to maintain difficult relationships or not, it's important to leave the past where it belongs. That may mean forgiving yourself or someone else. Maybe it just means dropping the old dynamic and doing your best to stay in the present.

Expect resistance if you do that. The mind looks for patterns and wants to stay in them.

Besides looking for patterns, one of the automatic functions of the conscious mind is to gather evidence to support what we believe. For example, if I was raised to think all wealthy people got their money by graft or corruption, I'm going to be focused on stories in the news that support my belief. That "evidence" is going to be added to my body of beliefs on the subject, so that I might say to my friends or myself, "See? That Bernie Madoff is just like every other rich snob, stealing from innocent people." At the same time, if the conscious mind encounters information that doesn't match beliefs in the inner mind, that information is frequently rejected even if the information is unmistakably true.

In the same way, I saw in my mother what reinforced my beliefs about her. Every word that sounded critical reinforced my belief that she was a judgmental, critical person.

Since I changed my mind and screwed up the courage to face an old idea about my mother, I now have formed a new belief: my mother is a (flawed) widow, 75 years old who has fragile moments but also lives quite bravely, and who is quite capable of understanding and sensitivity. Now when I look at my mother my conscious mind gathers evidence to reinforce this new belief.

That was a choice. Yes, it was forced on me in difficult and awkward circumstances, but I was willing to work past my old oath and expose my heart once again (by asking for her help) in exactly the same way that it was disappointed so many years ago.

I still have challenging moments with my mother, God bless her. That will probably never change. But I'm proud of myself for choosing to let go of my old ideas of her -- justified though they were at the time -- and get to know her as she is now. I wanted to fix what was broken in our relationship so those old tapes of her critical voice wouldn't continue to haunt me long after she'd passed away. That was something *I* had to do. Nothing -- especially our relationships -- are set in stone, immutable and rigid. Of all things, relationships are fluid and evolving, and probably the biggest difficulty in all troubled relationships is that we forget this and see only the person who hurt us.

A sad number of my clients have parents in the spirit world whom they disliked or even hated because they were abusive, absent, or cruel and my clients continue to see them as they were when alive. But the spirit people see something different -- they just see compassion and love.

Obviously I'm not recommending staying in an abusive relationship. Sometimes distance and time are the necessary ingredient for peace of mind. I'm only suggesting that if you examine your challenging relationships and find yourself, as I did, saying things like, "She always..." or "He never..." consider that it might be time for a fresh perspective. You and you alone can change how *you feel* about a person. Recognize that your mind is naturally disposed to find patterns in behavior and to reject new information -- so be diligent in your self-examination and know that these thoughts are not your fault, just a function of the mind. You *can* change your mind if it will bring you peace.

I feel like I got a gift from the spirit people which I had the courage to open. It was hard to make that phone call for help -- three times! It was hard to walk away from that friendship knowing I hadn't "fixed it," and that someone out there in the world dislikes me. But I did it. And if I can do it, so can you.

Amen.

*I did go to Russia that summer after securing a loan from my grandmother.

Mediumship Workshop Agenda

1. VAK
2. The importance of symbols
3. Getting ready (doing a meditation)
4. Setting up a signal to yourself and spirit people (switch on left brain)
5. Using hypnosis to reaffirm your abilities
6. practicing one-on-one
7. practicing gallery-style