Self-Empowerment

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Love of Intimacy

I had a number of fears while I was growing up. One of my fears had to do with my image. I was afraid of appearing stupid, bad, or crazy. I dubbed that my "triumvirate of fear". In response to that fear I did everything I could to appear smart, good, and sane. It sometimes felt pretty phony to only show that part of myself, but it seemed like a smart and sane thing to do. It took many years of spiritual and psychological work to understand and (partially) dismantle my unhealthy addiction to projecting some idealized image of myself.

Surrounded by people with values that did not seem to match mine, I was in survival mode. My precious need to connect brought out parts of myself that won friendships that were only partly satisfying because I was afraid to show the parts of me that might not be attractive.

Unfortunately, the price I paid for that strategy was a loss of true intimacy. I had the appearance of love in my life but it did not feel whole or real. At one point there was even an intense emotional drama that brought me to a fork in the road—one which frightened the poor unconscious me—so I wimped out and stayed in a relationship for ten years before having the courage to move on.

Like a turtle slowly sticking its head out from the safety of its protective shell, I began to have the clarity and courage to show more of myself. It was a slow and scary process. It was a process of self-empowerment. Pop psychology was telling me that I should be more honest. Spiritual practice was telling me that the truth would set me free. Experience was showing me that there were other people out there who shared some of my thoughts, ideas, desires, and fears.

I am still in process with this, but with much more clarity and conscious awareness. I know when I am holding back and why. I choose what I share within various relationships. Not everyone is my intimate friend; not everyone needs to know all the details of my inner life. My first mentor, David Michael, taught me about levels of relationships: acquaintance, companion, friend, and partner. That awareness helps me to

calibrate my sharing appropriately. It sets me free to share my truth with my partner and those who I trust to be close friends. It is empowering and deeply satisfying to be honest and share appropriately. Yay!

Over the past year of my recovery from breast cancer I have shared varying amounts of my experience with acquaintances, companions, friends, and partners. Honest appropriate sharing satisfied my need for connection, meaning, and contribution. Some know more details than others about the rocky road of my surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. That is as it should be for my feeling real and whole. It was not

always a pretty picture, but I honestly felt gratitude and blessed throughout the entire ordeal. I received the support and care of so many people, more than the younger me would ever have dreamed of.

The blessing of honesty, vulnerability, and true intimacy is the blossoming of love in my life. It is love of self and love of another. Not just a manipulation to not be alone, but truly enjoying relationships

that reflect myself to me and open to empathy and care.

I am hardwired to care deeply about relationships and people's feelings. That is neither good nor bad, it just is. It is good when I show up honestly. It is bad when I hold back out of fear of rejection or negative judgment. I get to notice that old triumvirate of fear when it pops up, and treat it like the frightened inner child that it is, and tenderly assure it that the grown up me can meet fear with compassion and right action.

As I complete the 21st year of publishing this newsletter, I marvel at the opportunity of healing that it has brought to me and others. Thank you for showing me that I'm not such a bizarre weirdo who could be unlovable. Like you, I am a soul on a human journey through a life with interesting ups and downs.

May we deepen in our love as we enjoy the ride!

Your fellow traveler,

Rev. Jill

The Tao of Intimacy

by Scott Grace

Opening up. Getting close. We are made for it. And many of us walk through our days on guard against it. Or, we are so hungry for it we leave ourselves while reaching out, and intimacy slips through our fingers like a wet bar of soap.

In our society intimacy is usually synonymous with getting physical. Yet plenty of people are sexual companions, but not really intimate with each other. Companionship doesn't automatically mean letting someone in. And rubbing body parts together does not automatically create intimacy.

True intimacy is not a meeting of the minds or bodies. It's between hearts and souls. It opens us to a whole other world, one rich with feelings, and one where the intellect takes a siesta. This is heavenly, what we long for, and what we are made for. Then, we are disappointed. Our unhealed wounds and romantic expectations put stars in our eyes, and we get attached to the yummy other person as the cause of our experience. We forget that they are just another messy mortal, and that opening our heart and getting out of the confines of the ego mind was the cause of our grand feelings. Intimacy, like all of life's goodies, is an inside job, arising from a state of consciousness, not another person.

When we believe that Mr. or Ms. Right is the source of our warm and fuzzy feelings, fear of loss becomes the driver of our behavior, bringing attachment and clinging. When fear is not leading the charge, intimacy can lead to sweet and soulful bonding, with a noticeable and refreshing absence of static cling.

That kind of bonding begins at home, inside yourself. Before reaching out, reach in. Say a gentle and compassionate hello to your hopes, fears, loneliness, and desires - everything that is present for you. Extend loving kindness and acceptance towards all your feelings, making sweet room for the entire spectrum of your humanness. If you are not self-validating, you are probably self-invalidating. So, turn it around. Release the hypnotic cultural taboo against self-love. Validate, validate, validate.

What's next, after making intimate friends with yourself? Then comes hooking up to a Higher Power, getting online with the Divine. Bring me a Higher

Love, but bring it on with feet on the ground of self-acceptance first. Most folks try to reach God in Heaven as an escape from the pain of believing they are damaged goods catching hell down here on earth. That causes us to be disembodied, disassociated, living out an illusionary split between spirit and body, heaven and earth, human and divine. If you believe on some level that God is Infinite Love and you are a can of chopped liver, well, as Dr. Phil would ask, "How's that working for you?"

It is through accepting and even delighting in our humanness that we can come to see ourselves as Divine Beings having a human experience. When you reject yourself, you cannot know God. Love yourself, warts and all, and you become a juicy embodiment of God's love, joy, wholeness, and peace.

The Tough News: Connection with a lover cannot fulfill you, or cause you to love yourself. It can distract you for a while, but if you do not come to a lover already hooked up to Self-Love and Higher Love, you will unconsciously siphon energy from another person's tank, leading to a dynamic where Country and Western lyrics make sense. They will eventually feel drained. And they will also be draining you. The feelings are mutual between semi-conscious consenting adults.

In our culture it's called falling in love, because it can feel so glorious when it begins. But falling in love is so often co-dependency having a party, a party that ends as soon as gravity inevitably brings floating feet back to the ground.

The Liberating News: Wherever you are on the journey, from single and looking, to up to your ears in draining and being drained, you can begin to love and fulfill yourself. You can turn yourself on. You can get so connected to the Divine that when you have intimacy with another it will seem like a three-way.

I mean to propose that it's a spiritual necessity to deeply enjoy the company you keep with yourself, coming to love yourself as fully and completely as you might dream of being loved, from your amazing head to your miraculous toes. Also, I'm talking about hitting the Source daily, drinking the Divine, and awakening to Higher Love. When you bring Higher Love to your human intimacy, it radiates, gushes, and effortlessly overflows. You're a love-beam. Then you tend to attract and be attracted to people who have also awakened to Higher Love. Two waterfalls make for a lot of joyous spilling over.

Intimacy is as simple as in-to-me-see, letting people see into you. In-to-me-see as a committed stand in life shatters the ego's survival strategy, which is to keep you safe by hiding parts of yourself, pretending, protecting, and defending.

The ego's love plan is to reserve your heart for one special soulmate partner, and keep you hiding behind a persona facade with the rest of humanity. That doesn't work. An open heart has got to be a way of life, across the board. You can't reserve your heart for one special someone and close your heart to others. That's not sustainable, nor is it real. Love, true love, is boundless, limitless, and joyously uncontainable. It always moves and expands to include others. You can be monogamous with your sexual expression, but not with your heart. Not if you are after true love.

At a certain point keeping your heart open across the board becomes more important than sharing intimacy with one special person. Paradoxically, that's when a soulmate partner can enter, through the doorway of your already established celebration of life and love.

I love what Emmanuel says on this subject in Emmanuel's Book Three, *What Is an Angel Doing Here?*

You reach to another with the expectation that others can fill you. They cannot. It is a joyous experience to walk with another human being whom you love, but if you have not first filled yourselves with your own devotion, then you begin to demand something that is impossible for any other human being to supply. Make room in your life for the ordinary sweet human beings all around you who will give you the opportunity to practice giving and receiving love. Let your heart learn loving. You cannot keep the door closed until the perfect one appears. That 'one' only walks through already opened doorways.

Intimacy As The Heart's Colonic

Intimacy heals by bringing old unconscious pain to the surface so it can be resolved and released. Closeness with another, or even the potential for impending closeness, flushes up and out our fears of abandonment and rejection, and their close relatives on the other side of the pendulum, fears of entrapment and commitment.

Both are two coin sides of the fear of loss: Fear of losing love, and fear of losing self.

These fears come up in all intimate relationships to be dealt with and healed. They are behind all behaviors of clinging, distancing, controlling, protecting, numbing out, aggression, passive-aggression, and the dance of mushy co-dependence and extreme, fear-based independence.

Let's hear it for those popular dance partners, mushy codependence and extreme independence! Have you played out both roles, been on both sides of the see-saw? I know I have.

We all can get there, through the simple, profound, and courageous process of learning to take tender, loving, emotional care of ourselves, both alone and in the presence of others. It all boils down to self-love.

Go past your intimacy comfort zone; old fears and intimacy avoidance behaviors will eventually arise. Getting to know your fears and how they operate behind the scenes will help you get beyond them. Perhaps no human being is completely free of these issues, but it is possible to get to a place where they seldom run the show, and when they do, you have tools and support to get through them. When you can feel your fears without acting them out in your usual behaviors, you are one breath away from letting go and claiming your freedom.

Intimacy shines light upon all the scary monsters so they can come out of the shadows and heal. We heal monsters by hugging them with our own empathy and compassion, until they soften and reveal to us the innocent and lovable little boy or girl behind the monster mask. We heal by bringing our fears to the light and warmth of our loving.

It is safe to get close. It is safe to become known. You're well worth getting to know. In fact, you are hot stuff, precious and lovable through and through. What's not to love? It's all God, and God don't make damaged goods.

Scott Grace is known as the Spiritual Dr. Seuss on YouTube. When he is off YouTube, he serves as a life coach, a modern day troubadour, and the author of "Teach Me How to Love." You can receive a half hour of coaching and guidance from him for free, no strings attached. Learn more at www.scottsongs.com

Heartbeat of Heaven (Song) & The Spoken Word Postscript

by singer songwriter Don White

Hello my friend. It's me again
I know I only show up when I'm all tore to shreds
And so here I am. I am a mess again.
I am standing in the doorway of my oldest friend
You see my son got mugged down on Boston Street.
They put a pistol to his temple and took his money.
No, no he's ok. Tonight he's home and he's safe but
look at me I'm all in pieces again.

Chorus

Jesus please just hold me and cradle me near to your breast. With my head against the heartbeat of heaven I know my poor heart can heal and rest.

The way I feel today, I am so full of rage If I could get near that mugger I could blow him away

But when you cradle me my heart can always see That hatred is the real mugger strangling me And my soul can't breathe with this weight on me Until I let it go my soul won't know no peace

Jesus please just hold me and cradle me near to your breast. With my head against the heartbeat of heaven I know my poor heart can heal and rest

If this man I hate came to you today
The love you'd wrap around each of us would be the
same

That amazes me to see that love can be Perfect, without judgment, constant and free As I live and breathe I truly do believe That no words can describe what this love does for me

Jesus please just hold me and cradle me near to your breast. With my head against the heartbeat of heaven I know my poor heart can heal and rest I know my poor heart can heal and rest I am going home now to heal and rest

Postscript to Heartbeat of Heaven

After the concert a woman stood in the theater until everyone had gone. When we were alone she asked about that song "you know, the one about your son getting mugged at gunpoint. Was it true?" I said it was. There was a long pause and then she said "my sixteen year old niece was just beaten to death by her

girlfriend's ex-husband." The words came out of her as if they had made the decision to be spoken on their own. She seemed to me like an unwilling but helpless vehicle for their desire. They hung in the air for what seemed like a very long time. Then moved slowly toward me and landed upon my back. This was among the heaviest of sentences I have ever shouldered and my knees immediately buckled beneath the weight of it.

I had no words for this woman. This was one of those moments that sheds light on the inherent inability of language to communicate adequately in matters of the heart. She wound up in my arms. Holding her, being an infinitely more eloquent expression of my complex emotions than any words I might have struggled to assemble. I was hoping she would not address the obvious contrasts in our experiences — namely, how much easier it was for me to sing about healing in regard to a situation that did not take the life of my loved one.

When she eventually spoke she said that the event was recent and that she had been refusing to deal with it because it was so new and so horrible but hearing my song made it impossible for her to keep the door closed to the wound in her heart and that she was actually coming to grips with the tragic magnitude of it for the first time.

Holding this sad and beautiful woman during this moment in her life was overwhelming. I felt her heart crack and shatter into pieces. I felt a cold wind blow through the hole in her chest which until that moment had been occupied by her warm and vital heart. Every three or four seconds her entire body shook uncontrollably as if someone was applying voltage to it. Inside my own emotional frame I was experiencing one of those outrageous moments where I find myself besieged by very powerful contradictory feelings occurring simultaneously. I felt awkward and uncomfortable. What could I possibly do for this woman? I also felt extremely privileged to be involved in such a profound human interaction. My heart was heavy with sadness for the depth of her suffering but I also felt that there was an undeniable solemn beauty to the moment. It was exhilarating. It was exhausting.

When she was gone and I was left alone to ponder what had just transpired - I was immediately struck by how lucky I felt that I chose to write the song from a perspective of healing rather than any of the other points of view that an event like that imposes upon its victims. Anger, resentment, bitterness, revenge, helplessness and fear were all viable candidates for the theme of the song but I chose to write from my prayer place. Which is where I go at the times in my life when I am in an emotional free fall. Where God's unconditional love can wrap its wings around me and breathe its eternal

wisdom back into my scattered pieces. I knew that this was a place to write from that would enable me to give something positive back to the listener as opposed to just emphasizing the obvious negative aspects of the incident.

What I learned from my short time with this woman is that in some instances language can be an entirely ineffective means of communication between human beings. In other instances it is capable of piercing the most heavily fortified armor that a person might assemble to protect their secrets, their vulnerability or their pain. The close proximity of the subject matter of the song to this woman's recent tragedy was such that she could not defend herself against it. The song penetrated her defenses and laid bare the wound. Had it been full of the bitterness and anger that I felt at the time of the mugging, I would have been guilty of the very serious crime of laying my knife to the open wound of a stranger.

If artists are going to hone the blades of their craft so that they cut swiftly and indefensibly to the core of a given subject, they should not underestimate the immense responsibility that comes with this calling. Anyone blessed with the rare and privileged ability to put their hands on the pain of strangers should live each moment with the knowledge that heaven will not shine gently upon the hand of any person that touches the pain of her children with anything less than compassion and love.

Singer Songwriter Don White is the author of "Memoirs of a C Student". The song "Heartbeat For Heaven" appears on his album entitled "Rascal" available for purchase on donwhite.net/recordings.

There's Always Room at His Table by Scott Macaulay

In September of 1985, when I was 24, my folks decided to get divorced. I was taught that to be a good son, I needed to be supportive and loving to each parent and to my siblings. But nobody was talking to anybody.

If you were nice to one parent, the other one would get mad at you. So when October came, I thought, What's going to happen at Thanksgiving? And I just did not like the thought of being home alone – or anywhere alone – on Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is not about gifts or fireworks or hoopla. It's a meal around a table where you give thanks for the blessings you have, and you really can't do that by yourself and have much fun.

I decided to put an ad in the local paper: If people thought they would find themselves alone, they could give me a call, and I would make a Thanksgiving dinner. That first year, a few people came, and they had a good time. I was nervous about making a mess out of the food and disappointing people. But the food was OK, and I didn't burn anything.

I've held the dinner every year since. Last Thanksgiving, 84 people showed up. Sometimes they're new to town; sometimes they're recently divorced or widowed. I've had people who were new to the country and didn't speak any English, but they enjoyed my Thanksgiving dinner. I've had poor people, people who come from AA, old people. Also not counted within that number: I always feed the police. The firefighters and EMTs are in buildings with kitchens and can have their own Thanksgiving dinner among themselves, but the police officers are in their cars, driving around town on call.

Two years ago, a woman with Parkinson's disease came, and she was not good on her feet. She had been in a nursing home for seven years and had never been out. Somebody told her about the dinner, and she hired an ambulance to bring her, at \$200 plus mileage. She had a great time, and she cried when the ambulance returned to get her. She didn't want to go home.

Most of the people who come don't know who I am. They know that there's some skinny guy in the kitchen, but they don't know my name. I think the theme of my life, and everything I do, could be summed up with the name of an old hymn called "Brighten the Corner Where You Are." I hope my legacy will be that I came into the world, I brightened the corner, and then I quietly left the world unnoticed.

Recorded on October 21, 2010 and published in the November 2013 issue of Reader's Digest. The following note described the planned 2013 Thanksgiving dinner: This year, Scott will host his 28th Thanksgiving dinner, which will be held at the First Baptist Church in Melrose, Massachusetts. He'll spend the day before the feast decorating the room, and on Thanksgiving, he'll arrive at 4 a.m. to put the turkeys in the oven.



Daily Word

I celebrate my unity with all life.

In childhood, my notion of family might have stretched no further than my relatives. At some point, I may have widened my concept of family to include friends and members of my spiritual community. I might also consider my neighbors and coworkers to be family, as well as any beloved pets or animals.

As I mature in my understanding of All That Is, I see that I am one with all of life. I celebrate my unity with all living beings.

All people have the spirit of God within them. If I have been excluding anyone from my circle of respect, honor, and care, I now open my heart to Spirit within and embrace them as family.

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Editor: Michael P. Tunney

Agape Interfaith Ministries, 1100 Friendship Street, Philadelphia, PA 19111 Phone: (215) 742-0552

Email: Jilleroni@juno.com Web: www.AgapeInterfaith.org

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Agape Interfaith Ministries 1100 Friendship Street Philadelphia, PA 19111

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