



Allure Article – for Sunday, July 2009

### **I Am a Work In Progress**

It is the middle of the night as I write—a rare occurrence for me. Events of this past week, deeply personal ones churning inside me, pulled me from the deep sleep I normally enjoy.

I am humbled as I face myself and admit I am still often unable to fully accept those closest to me. My fear of being criticized and judged puts me on the defensive. Arms crossed, face tightened, fists clenched—I reveal through my body the insecurity that lurks in my heart. Why do I take so personally the way other people view me? I breathe deeply and welcome the impulse to grow, to awaken. I want to be honest. I want the people around me to know I value them.

I say I believe each of us is entitled to our own perspectives and beliefs. I say I want to embody this openness and love. I say that I welcome observations and honest dialogue. Yet I cannot consistently hold this level of consciousness. There are moments when I react emotionally and adopt a self-protective stance when someone close to me points out a shortcoming to which I've been blind. I've noticed that when I feel threatened, I have difficulty listening for the truth in what is being shared.

Reviewing this week's encounters, my inner being beckons me to sit quietly and observe my self-conflict. I direct my magnifying glass inward to study my heart. I ask Spirit to show me the root of my pain. I note my fear of being misunderstood and judged. It opposes my determination to demonstrate openness and love. I do not want to hurt another human being in any way. Thus, when someone gives me the gift of their honesty, telling me that my approach caused them to feel intimidated, I am deeply grieved. After all this soul work, how is it that I retain the capacity to come across in an unloving way?

The voice of Source within offers me an answer: Lingering lack of self-acceptance fosters fear. Fear causes me to push others away, lashing out rather than listening. My choice to defend is actually an attack I deem justified. If I wasn't afraid, I could instead acknowledge another viewpoint; that is, I could join in peace and find an insight that deepens my bond with this other person. When I let go of my fear I can break these old patterns of communication and fresh possibilities emerge in my relationships.

If I don't accept myself, I will not be able to accept another person. I am grateful to be reminded of this truth. I am astounded at the seemingly endless layers of fear I carry. I accept these intense interactions as grace. With Spirit's help, I peel back yet another layer and observe it calmly. Rather than arguing, I choose to offer gratitude to my learning partner. I can indulge my sense of guilt and sadness at my "failings" or I can release myself and celebrate the gift of another opportunity to heal and grow.

I am a work in progress. Aren't we all? Those of us who begin to feel we've "made it," that we have mastered it all, invariably have to take a second look. It is the grace and love of Life that continues to guide us to the people who best push our buttons. We are surrounded by the perfect learning partners for the next phase of our personal expansion. No, it doesn't feel comfortable when we find ourselves reacting harshly to another human being. However, we can choose a new approach. Rather than being embarrassed by what we discover, we can open ourselves to it. We can study ourselves.

I open to understand the wounded parts of me that remain so sensitive. I desire to move to a point where I can truly say, "Thank you," when others share viewpoints that threaten my ego, pointing out aspects they view as flawed.

Can we make room for all perspectives even if we don't necessarily agree with what is being said? Can we be kind enough to listen, not just out of courtesy, but with a sincere desire to lovingly welcome the message another person is offering us? Might we be able to grow to a point that we don't need to take personally variant viewpoints but can instead, faithfully examine ourselves and acknowledge the strands of truth in another person's perception of us?

Byron Katie, a wise teacher whose books have helped me (and millions of others) immensely, says that if she had only one prayer it would be, "God, deliver me from the need for acceptance, approval, appreciation or love." Here is how I interpret this: Find your acceptance within. See yourself as one with the Life Force within you. Only then can you allow others to be as they are, to think as they do. Only then will you be truly at peace and truly available.

It takes courage and vulnerability for a friend, family member, acquaintance, even a stranger to speak from the heart. Their honesty is a gift. Can we heal enough to honor them by listening with respect—truly hearing what they are trying to share? Honest listening offers a miracle to listener and speaker alike. When I open my heart to receive another person's words without judgment, my ego gets out of the way and our spirits unite. It may be difficult to admit we are wrong. But doing so becomes a salve that can heal our conflict. Listening opens the way to love.

You may be saying, what if I'm not wrong? Perhaps you are not. There is still no need to defend. You can say instead, "I understand how you can see things that way. Thank you for your perspective. I appreciate your honesty."

Inevitably, the Universe gives me opportunities like these to practice the topics I plan to write about. Early this week a dear client of mine, told me of several instances where he felt hurt by the way another person perceived him. During our session we chuckled together as we saw how much effort we spend trying to be right and trying to force others to "understand us." We concluded that if we could just learn to come to peace with ourselves, knowing that we are learning and growing, doing our best in each moment, we would be amazed at the additional time and energy at our disposal. Not more than an hour later, conversations emerged between me and several people within my cherished, inner circle of learning partners. I found myself drained in the same way my client had been. The Universe has a great sense of humor.

I am a work in progress. We are all works in progress. Using reading and writing to share concepts of what makes life easier does not have the same effect as actually practicing it.

Your assignment this week is to become aware of how often you are defensive when another person shares their perspectives with you. Are you taking the time to listen or are you consumed with preparing your response as they are speaking? Slow your mind down. Become fully present in the conversation. Really hear what is being said. Take a deep breath before you speak. Then, allow your response to come from your heart, full of gentleness and respect.

Will you practice with me? Together let's find what a wonderful place honest introspection and respectful listening can create in our lives.

### Food For Thought

"Where we are wrong, make us willing to change; where we are right, make us easy to live with."  
~Peter Marshall

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