

Losing It!

I know that if you are reading this May message, you are essentially a good, kind person with a big heart. But I also know that from time to time, another human being, or a group of human beings, pushes your buttons. Then, without even having time to think, you are taken over by some kind of angry energy that is linked to an unkind, aggressive intention toward whoever has annoyed you. How do I know this sometimes happens to you? Because it happens to all human beings without exception.

It certainly happens to me all the time, but it was particularly noticeable last week when I was on retreat in Assisi. There I was meditating with my eyes shut in my favourite spot in front of the famous medieval San Damiano Cross in The Basilica of Saint Clare. Because I was feeling 'high' on the retreat energy, my heart was wide open as I meditated. I was also silently saying something to myself along the lines of, 'I am Love and nothing but Love and I vow to extend nothing but Love wherever I go'. Then all of a sudden, my inner peace was shattered as an elderly Indian lady shoved me out of the way with the whole of her body so that she could sit down in my spot right in front of the cross.

Well, I am extremely glad you could not listen in to the voice inside my head that said some really unkind things about that lovely lady! One minute, I am resting serenely in an infinite field of love and the next my ego was completely in charge once again and complaining in a really aggressive way about someone who had committed an incredibly minor assault on me.

Luckily, I refused to indulge in feeling too guilty about moving so quickly out of infinite love and back into egoic anger. In fact, I even saw the funny side of having my spiritual bubble so quickly pierced and deflated. I also thought to myself, 'Well that will teach you to think that you are further advanced on the path home to love than you actually are! That Indian lady is clearly a 'Reverse Bodhisattva' sent to teach you an important lesson in spiritual humility.'

Then later on that day, I found a little video on You Tube by a Franciscan monk entitled 'Spiritual Wisdom from the Little Flower.' Now in Catholic circles, everyone knows that the 'Little Flower' is an incredibly popular Saint called St Therese of Lisieux who died of TB in 1897 at the very young age of 24. Before she died, St Therese wrote a book entitled *The Story of a Soul* and in it she talks about getting irritated from time to time by the actions of some of the other nuns in her convent. For example, once when she was silently praying, an elderly nun in the chapel started clicking her rosary beads so loudly that St Therese became quite annoyed and was sorely tempted to give her a dirty look. Another time, she got cross when a nun in the laundry repeatedly splashed her with dirty water.

St Therese then decided to make a real effort to refrain from ever showing her fellow nuns that they had annoyed her by giving them some kind of disapproving look. She then went a big step further and vowed to welcome all daily annoyances as gifts from God. So she then chose to perceive the clicking rosary beads as some kind of delightful music and decided to perceive being splashed with dirty water as a novel form of being sprinkled with holy water.

Now, I have absolutely no desire to become saintly if being saintly involves martyring oneself for God or for Jesus. But I think it might be perfectly possible for us all to aspire to follow St Therese's sweet example by letting go of our minor moments of irritation whenever someone pushes our buttons. Maybe we too could practise re-interpreting all annoying incidents as some kind of gift from God?

By the way if you are not comfortable with the concept of God you could just as well see every annoying event in your life as a wonderful gift from the universe to assist you to become more patient or more unconditionally loving and forgiving in a world that desperately needs much less anger and self-righteousness and much more loving kindness and forgiveness.

I find that it really helps me to do this kind of practice if I remember one of my favourite passages from *A Course in Miracles* that tells us to see all kinds of aggressive behaviour as simply a call for love from someone who believes that they are somehow lacking in love, even though they may not be the slightest bit conscious of this core belief. Now it is of course a huge stretch for us to start to believe that mass murderers are just looking for love. But I don't think we can truly love or forgive anyone for harming us in some pretty major way until we choose to see their deeper innocence and hurt.

So here we have two helpful practices we might choose to focus on during the merry month of May. The first practice is pretty simple. Every time someone presses our buttons just a little bit, we can choose to pause and then to give our irritation up to God/The Universe/The Earth/The Sky/ Love Itself. (Please choose whichever one sits best with you)

Now the second practice is definitely more challenging, but if you feel ready to go for some deeper healing this month, you might like to remember someone from your past who hurt you quite badly in some way or another. As you recall that painful memory, you can say something along the lines of: 'I am now ready to release this stored pain from my system. I am ready to see my attacker as innocent of all the charges I have laid against them for so long. I now choose to see them as wholly innocent, not because they did not behave in a hurtful way, but because they had not got a clue about what they were doing.'

From my own experience of forgiving so many individuals from my own painful past, I know that it is sometimes an incredibly challenging healing process, but it is always so worth it! One of the greatest joys in my life has been reconnecting to the memory of my dear adoptive father with so much love and gratitude to him pouring out of my heart after decades of holding some really painful grievances against him. I just wish that far more people could also experience the joy of completely and deeply forgiving others and themselves for all mistakes we humans make big and small and thus returning home to love where all is well always.

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