

Week 18 - 4th Quadrant Practice - Bringing Unconditional Love to our Caretaking

*The last temptation is the greatest treason:
To do the right deed for the wrong reason.
~T.S. Eliot*

The term 'caretaking,' is used to cover a variety of unaware bargains that people strike with one another for hidden motives, even to themselves. It is for the most part well socialized behaviors that are condoned and even admired, and certainly not recognized for what they are, by the general public.

Every one of us has learned to 'caretake,' other people. This means literally what it says - taking from another person to feel safe, accepted, admired, important and valued by tending to their feelings and what is perceived as their needs, in complete unawareness of the transactional nature of the exchange and believing oneself to be "loving." I am deliberate in saying, "perceived needs," because usually it is just giving people what they want - not what they need.

A need is universal. Every human needs safety, attention, value, to be seen and heard - and so on. A want is a tactic to try to get a need met. Eg. I want you to do the dishes for me, because this means to me that I have value and am loved. This is a very tragic tactic that can never work to meet the inner need to know oneself as love and of intrinsic value.

Caretaking can manifest as being "nice," and "agreeable," aimed at appeasing, smoothing over hard feelings and avoiding conflict due to anxiety around the expression of authentic feelings and dealing with issues. E.g. I am nice to you so that you will like me. I will do this for you so that you will not get angry with me or reject me, I will listen to you for hours on end because I am afraid to say "no," fearing that I will be told that I am "selfish and uncaring," I will cheer you up because your pain makes me uncomfortable and helpless. None of this is loving. It is not in your best interests, nor is it meeting the other person's real need.

By definition this kind of behavior is ultimately selfish in that it is all about you and not the other person at all. It is the core of what is known in addiction literature as "codependency."

It is not love at all - in fact it is the opposite. It is living an inauthentic life steeped in the fear of feeling shame. It is easily called out for what it is, because in the event of "doing, giving, helping, rescuing and caretaking other people," if the reciprocal gratitude is not given and the inner need of the giver not met, the relationship becomes toxic with resentment, anger, hidden judgments, conflict, accusations about fairness, trying to negotiate to get what you are not getting, and eventually the parting ways.

So how will one see and recognize this behavior if it is done in unawareness? You will recognize it in very specific behaviors and responses:

- Avoiding speaking
- Avoiding speaking about negative feelings, needs and real issues
- Hiding anything that feels shameful or might be judged by another
- Avoiding conflict at all cost
- Superficial, pleasant and socially acceptable but meaningless conversation
- Not asking any real questions or show any real interest in another person
- Being overly responsible and saying "yes," to too many things, trying to please too many people
- Being proud of this fact

- Seeing others as “selfish,” or “ungrateful,” for all that is done for them.
- Expressing underlying resentment and hostility for giving up so much of themselves, that slips out inadvertently despite efforts to be “nice.”
- Giving double messages of “nice,” on top and the vibe of anger underneath
- Being self-righteously proud of being altruistic, loving people the more they give away of themselves, even at the expense of their own emotional, physical and spiritual well being
- Seeing themselves as sacrificial, martyrs
- Saying things like, “If you want things done right, you may as well do it yourself.” “I didn’t do it because I wanted anything in return but a little gratitude would have been nice.”
- Wanting others to be “happy,” and doing things to “make them happy.”
- Attempting to make people happy including telling them to “think positively,” “don’t dwell on the past.... Let bygones be bygones,” and live by mottoes like, “live and let live,” “forgive and forget,” “just keep the peace,” “Don’t rock the boat,” “It’s not worth the trouble, just do it yourself....”
- Consistently do for others what they can do for themselves, enabling dependency and a sense of low self-worth in the other
- Giving is always attached to some underlying need - power, status, thanks gratitude, recognition, affirmation, love, value etc.
- Over-extending themselves and feeling resentment about it
- Being unable to see other options and feeling compelled to continue in these dynamics with many reasons why “they have to rescue their husband from the bar, help their neighbor with the children etc. etc.
- Being judgmental and superior over others that do not do as much as they do
- Being unable to discern the real needs of another
- Being unable to set limits, say “no,” and respect their own and other people’s boundaries
- Giving unsolicited advice and help
- Giving more attention to “taking care of things,” and less to being actually present to another person
- Distancing from another’s feelings and needs with interruptions, platitudes, advice etc.
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Add your own observations...

“If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” ~1 Corinthians 13:1

In order to bring Unconditional Love to this condition of caretaking, it is important to start investigating what real love actually is.

It is a state of being, not a feeling. It is a choice, not acting out of unaware motives of fear, shame and need. Love speaks the truth, in love and does not “keep the peace,” or avoid conflict. And in doing so, it will still be patient, kind, humble, but also firm, clear and uncompromising. Love does not keep score and build up resentment. It can hold all of the ways in which you have been a caretaker without judgment, but with firm limit setting. It seeks to understand deeply, so that limits can be set around serving the Master of fear and shame. Love demands honesty, truth and authenticity. All fear, shame, need and defense must be sacrificed. Love is self-revealing, accepting, but also firm in its consequences. If Love is not chosen and instead, fear and shame and defense are chosen, there are very natural consequences built into the created order, of more pain and more suffering. This is what is referred to in the east as Karma and in the West as living on the Wheel of Fate.

Choosing love and truth is not necessarily rational, in the ego sense. It might ruffle feathers, it might trigger other people, it might result in conflict and rejection, it may result in even more severe immediate consequences such as losing a job, or relationship, or as in the case of the great martyrs of the world, your very life. Most people cannot recognize love, nor welcome it. They are threatened by it because it cannot be controlled by their demands and self entitlement. However, the long-term consequence is inherent in the choice.... You realize yourself as love and truth, even if others do not like the limits you set, the truths you tell, the ways in which you will no longer be used, and the ways in which you speak up authentically and honestly.

Love holds all our humanity and our suffering and our bad behavior in reverence, knowing that all life is inherently and intrinsically of value. And it tells the truth about what is a "lie," and demands truth and authenticity without being rejecting. In other words, Love corrects behavior while loving the one doing the behavior.

People who have the capacity for unconditional love are able to accept, have compassion and empathy for others by seeing deeply into root causes of emotion and trauma. They believe in the value and worth of others and self, despite mistakes. There is an absence of judgmentalism, criticism or desire to control oneself or anyone else, knowing that awareness itself results in organic inner correction. Love maintains an attitude and awareness of one's own true needs and the other persons true needs at the same time. It acts in accordance to this awareness, even when doing what is in the best interests of both, is painful and creates conflict. Integrity is more important than being liked.

Love can be recognized in responses and behaviors that indicate:

- Empathy - imagining oneself in another's situation and experience
- Compassion - being willing to hold and be with that person's suffering fully, knowing it in oneself, non-anxiously and at ease
- An ability to be fully present to self and other, in suffering, without rushing to fix, change or avoid the experience of another
- A basic belief in the intrinsic worth of self and all sentient beings regardless of color, creed, achievement, education, gender, status, wealth or any other external marker
- An ability to give without expectation of reward or fear of punishment
- An ability to act with integrity and speak truth even in the face of disapproval, judgment, rejection or persecution
- An ability to not allow others to transgress boundaries or treat one with disrespect in any way.
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Add your own observations...

The requirement here, in living the life of the Mystic, is to see the former in ourselves and bring the latter to this condition. When I live in right relationship to self, I will with others too.

Can I bring the mountain top experience of Being and Giving Love, to the condition of not being love, but acting in fear and shame and all the compromised ways it manifests in caretaking?

EXERCISES:

See if you can recognize this week all the caretaking you do. How is this a projection of your inner relationship to yourself? How do you overpower, indulge, fix, rescue, caretake your inner child's feelings, instead of being present lovingly and setting limits with behavior? If you cannot do this internally, you will of course not recognize it externally nor be able to set limits in love with others either.

We are healed (made whole - ONE) to the extent that we love ourselves as we are right now: blemishes, vulnerabilities, warts and all. Not as we wish we were or will be at some time in some distant future. In other words, we cannot reject ourselves today and expect to accept ourselves someday. Only self-acceptance, love, can bring out wholeness. We gain that loving ability by practicing it on ourselves, and others, as we can now.
~Marsha Sinetar. *Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics*

For more reading and check lists check into websites for "Co-dependents Anonymous."

How have you given people what they want instead of what they need? How have you given yourself what you want instead of what you need? Answering this question is essential to recovery. What childhood needs still exert power over your choices? How are you going to start listening to them and meeting those needs?

For a great movie on Codependency watch, "If Only the Lonely," with the late John Candy. You will laugh and cry as you see yourself in this very sweet movie.

Listen to the lyrics of the song, "God of the Mountain," and see if you can hear it as an internal dynamic, instead of a dependent child on an external God - up there and out there....

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
~1 Corinthians 13:2