

CHAPTER 8

DETACHMENT AND LETTING GO

March 2014

More Letting Go

I think there is a deep and subtle letting go that faces us when our children become adults and no longer need us to “parent” them in the same way.

The “not so subtle” letting go seems easy, no more complete financial responsibility, no more taxi cab service, no more waiting up at night to see if they get home safely.

But I’m talking about the deeper, more difficult letting go. I think it may just boil down to one sentence that we believe with our *whole being*,

“I don’t know what’s best for them and besides I’m not in charge of that.”

That’s very hard after so many years of being the one responsible for their safety and physical and emotional wellbeing.

So, what does it mean for us when they no longer need the type of attention we’ve been habituated to give? How do we dis-identify with our role as a parent?

For me, it means attempting to be constantly mindful of those patterns of caretaking that are no longer necessary. And that practice has been quite a process, coming very slowly over many years and many stages.

But even more subtly I think the letting go means how much do I *trust* that they can guide their own lives? How much do I reallllllly believe that their life has its own purpose, its own trajectory and that I am now an adjunct to their lives not the primary lighthouse?

In reality my kids have never given me any reason to believe they couldn’t manage their own lives. They have almost always made good choices. (at least the ones I

know about) So I think I must now turn my worry, concern, and my own personal agenda for them over to *their* higher self.

I am slowly.....very slowly, embodying this truth and this is where my beliefs help me. I really do believe that they are on their own path, with their own lessons to learn, their own suffering to go through so they can gain the wisdom and strength from those experiences that will help them grow. But oh, my, it is so painful to stand by and watch and not jump in there with solutions and advise when I see them in pain.

Eckhart Tolle describes this as their pain body activating mine and that's exactly what it feels like. But if this is true then it's my job to take care of my own pain body so I can stand by, with love and support, but not try to fix it or make it better. If I have expectations for how they should live their lives or if I don't show them the faith that I have in them, then I am doing them a disservice. It's as if I'm not really seeing *them* or being present to who they are.

Of course, I do have hopes and wishes for them, but I think that is different than expectations. Expectations imply that I am invested in the outcome. And why am I invested? Sometimes I forget, and I think my children are a reflection of myself. If they screw up I am worried about how people might judge me as a parent. I do take responsibility for how I parented. I made plenty of mistakes, but sometimes kids make choices that have very little to do with how they were parented.

More often my attachment has been about me not being able to tolerate seeing them in pain. Again, the necessary action is for me to do the work to heal this part of myself. I wonder if I know how to tolerate my own pain?

What makes it equally difficult is that I almost always think I know how it *should* be for them and if they just did this or that it would be better, but that does not honor them or who they are. It's just imposing my agenda onto them and that is sooooo not helpful. Besides which it creates a feeling of separation between us that doesn't feel good.

I think this deeper level of letting go, this detachment, with love, is one of my life's biggest lesson, especially when it involves my family.

As long as I think I know how things should be, how people should be I am not present to who they really are or what is really happening right now. Byron Katie

calls this “arguing with reality.” This is what is, right now, right here in the midst of pain, or suffering or disappointment, this just is what it is. Can I trust that it has meaning and purpose that I may know nothing about? Can I just *be* with it? It’s definitely an inside job, this coming to terms with what triggers my over protectiveness. Ok, I know all this intellectually, but to be honest I very rarely can access those higher beliefs when it is most needed. So, I am here, writing this in a blog in an attempt to remind myself of what I already know and to help me embody and integrate these truths more deeply into myself. Thanks for listening. I plan to take this page out and re-read it frequently.

“Your happiness and suffering depend on your actions and not on my wishes for you.” Jack Kornfield

On Children
Kahlil Gibran

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and He bends you with His might
that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,
so He loves also the bow that is stable.

CHAPTER 9

TRUST

November 2013

Wise Effort

My daughter recently gave a dharma talk at the weekly Insight Meditation meeting here in Seattle. When I asked her what she spoke about she told me the topic was the Buddhist concept of “wise effort.” She compared her recent labor and birth experience to this idea and explained that there were different *aspects* of wise effort.

In the early stages of labor, she said, she was focused on being totally present to what her body was experiencing, just allowing and flowing with the contractions as they came. This was one aspect of wise effort, just being with whatever was happening, no resistance, no struggle, just being carried by the moment. Then at the last stage a different energy was required. A *huge* effort was needed to actually birth this being. A focused, determined, commitment to do whatever it took to actually bring this baby into the world. Both of these energies embody wise effort but have a far different quality to them. And, according to her, “both aspects are fed by the discerning wisdom that knows what is needed in a given situation.”

I’ve been thinking a lot about this idea since she shared her talk with me. Often when I’m pondering an idea, life gives me an opportunity to apply it. So, a few days ago, I was having a “tune up” session with my therapist and she shared with me her perception that I seem to have a belief that I must work very hard to become a better person. That somehow being a good person required a big effort and usually a great deal of struggle. She wondered aloud how it would be for me to see my essence as already perfect, divine even, and made in the image of that divinity.

Now this was not a new thought for me but somehow as I considered her words in the context of my daughter’s speech I began to sense how that might look. What

if, instead of committing to the next self-improvement class, for instance, I just *trusted* that I would be shown if something needed improving. Could I just *allow* life to bring it to me, instead of always, “pushing the river” as another friend described me? Could “wise effort” be just meeting whatever came my way with an attitude of acceptance and flow, trusting wholly in the process? Then when the energy for a new birth was needed and it felt like a more focused commitment was being called for could I trust, again, that the right effort would be made?

As these thoughts sort of morphed into a deeper understanding my body immediately relaxed. I could feel the strain I have lived under with that old belief. It had a driven quality to it and that’s not how I want to live my life.

Being a Scorpio I know that I am hardwired to go deep, to look for the essence. That blueprint will always be a part of me, and I sort of like that about myself. What I think is now beginning to emerge is a deep trust in the *organic* process, the *easy* understanding, the *soft* awareness, without any *driving force*. No rivers to push, no struggle to be more, do more, no *need* to achieve, just a flowing forth in perfect timing and of its own volition.

I’m pretty sure I could rest easily in that flow.

Guidance from Eileen Caddy (One of the founders of Findhorn)

“Do not waste time trying to overcome your weaknesses and failures. Simply raise your consciousness, transcend and free your thoughts from limitation and illusion, and find within the very centre of your being wholeness and completeness. Know the meaning of true freedom and the knowing of that freedom sets you free to do My will and walk in My ways. Cease your struggling and become still. Cease wallowing in your imperfections and be ye perfect even as I AM perfect.....”

Chapter 10

Boundaries and Co-Dependence

February 2014

Taking People at Their Word

Lately I've noticed another one of those wonderful patterns that sits in my endless reservoir of habitual thinking... sits there quite comfortably, thank you very much, until my awareness kicks in. If I'm lucky it kicks in before it has to hit me over the head.

So, pondering on an interaction I had a few weeks ago, what I noticed was this: I offered to help someone, not really wanting to, just sort of to be polite. I didn't really expect them to take me up on it. I expected them to defer, as I usually do and say, "Oh, thanks, but I've got it." Instead she said, "great, here's what you can do." OMG, she took me at my word. It wasn't a tsunami of insight, I just noticed it.

Later, another conversation. My daughter was asking a friend of mine for a favor. My friend said, "sure." My daughter says to me, "Do you think she's just being polite? Maybe she feels obligated." I heard myself say to her, "Well maybe you can just take her at her word." It got me to thinking of all the times I have wasted energy trying to figure out if people really meant what they said. It hasn't been easy for me to ask for help in my life, but this awareness has provoked me into thinking in a new way. What if I did just take people at their word? PERIOD, end of story.

I began to experiment. At my recent book signing several people came up and asked me if they could help me set up. I said, "yes" without a second thought. At a weekend seminar at my home a few weeks ago I asked a friend to take charge of the coffee. Not a big deal, but I didn't worry about imposing...I just assumed, "he's an adult. He can say no." What a revelation. *If I have a need, I can ask, and just assume people will tell me the truth....and if they don't, it's not my job to figure out why or agonize over whether they really meant it. I'll just take them at their word. I'll just assume they have the ability to say no.*

I'm also wanting to be more mindful of when I *offer* to help. I am a type 2, on the Enneagram so I'm almost out of my seat before anyone asks for anything. Now I am learning to pause and ask myself.... Is this offer coming from a conscious choice to help or am I just falling into the old habitual reaction?

Here's what I have figured out about myself. Usually when I *deflect* an offer of help it's because I *assume* the person is offering out of obligation or to be polite. (not hard to see where my daughter came up with her questions)

Another reason I deflect is because I want to feel competent. "I can do this by myself." The need to prove this to people and myself has lessened with age and the reality that it really is harder for me to do some things alone. Sometimes I refuse offers of help because I have a genuine desire to make things easier for others, like when my children come over for dinner and I take charge of everything. I know how busy they are, how stressed, trying to manage kids, careers, relationships so in an effort to give them just a few hours of not having to do anything, I offer to do it all. But lately I've been clearer about asking them to take charge when I don't feel like it.

Probably the biggest lesson in all of this is for me, is something I've been working on for a long time.... asking for what I need without trying to decide ahead of time whether or not I'm imposing on anyone. Let the adult in them tell me it's too much or it's inconvenient or they just don't feel like it. How much easier and clearer and more direct is that?