

Spiritual Re-Parenting

~ a talk by Tara Brach presented on December 7, 2016

(audio and video available at: www.tarabrach.com/spiritual-reparenting/)

I would like to begin with a little story I heard in the press about a man that tried to sneak his pet turtle onto a flight, and he tried to pass it off as if it was fast food. The way he did it was that he placed it between two buns and wrapped it in a Kentucky Fried Chicken wrapper. But he got caught and, when he was discovered, he told the airport officials that he just really couldn't leave his beloved pet at home.

I thought it was an interesting little story because I have had times that I have nearly canceled a teaching trip because I just didn't want to leave my dog. It's kind of a wrenching feeling, and it speaks to how profound this sense of wanting connection and not wanting to be separated is. It's so deep in us. There's so much research now that having pets, and that sense of warmth and connection, and the Oxytocin and tenderness . . . it increases longevity and happiness. And the other side of the equation is that, when there is a deficit of connection, and when there is a lot of loneliness, there is depression. And when we don't have adequate bonding early on? Death — physical, and on other levels too.

In the theme of tonight, which has very much to do with connection and separation, there is a myth that I love to share now and then — one of the legends from the holy grail. It has to do with Parsifal — a young knight on a quest — and he wanders into this very parched and devastated kingdom where nothing grows. It's a real wasteland. When he arrives at the capital, he finds that the townspeople are behaving as if everything's normal. They're in this total trance. They are on automatic, and they are just acting and doing their daily duties, but with no affect, really — completely in another realm. Nothing is growing, the whole place is devastated, and they are dull and mechanical. And then Parsifal goes into the castle where he finds the King, who is in his bed, pale and dying. Like the land around him, the monarch's life is waning.

Parsifal is full of questions, but he has been taught by an older knight that asking questions is improper for a knight of his rank, so he keeps quiet and, the next morning, he leaves the castle to continue on his journey. But the witch Kundry encounters him as he is making his way onward. And, when she hears that he visited the king but hadn't even asked the king anything about himself, she goes

into a complete rage and she says, “How could he be so callous? He could have saved the king and the kingdom by only extending himself.” So Parsifal turns around — because he is really taking her words to heart. He goes back into the wasteland, right to the castle and, without even breaking his stride, he walks right up to the King, bends down onto his knees and, with incredible gentleness, he says, “Oh, My King, what aileth thee?”

Within moments color returns to the King’s cheeks and he stands up, fully healed. And with that, everything comes to life. Throughout the kingdom, the people awake and talk with animation. They laugh and sing together, and they have a vigorous step. The crops begin to grow, and the grass on the hills glows with a new green of spring — life has been renewed.

That’s the story.

And so, what happened? What happened to make that awakening possible, from the trance into this aliveness and vitality and presence?

It was Parsifal extending himself, with care, to reach and touch and connect with another being. That is what awakens us from trance. Connection. Sometimes, the connection occurs as we learn to come back home into our bodies and start really having the courage and presence to feel the aliveness that’s here. And sometimes it comes because we listen to our own hearts in a new way. And sometimes it comes because somebody reaches out to us or we reach out to them. But it is all about relationship — coming into our relatedness, realizing we are not separate; that the truth is this living web and that we are absolutely in a belonging — an interdependence.

So the trauma in our life . . . the wounds . . . they all have to do with severed belonging. They come in our families and in our culture — ways that we, in some way, get split off from feeling the okay-ness of this body and heart, that we’re okay. We are told that something is wrong. We split off because we get hurt, and it’s too painful to live in our bodies and to feel that hurt. We split off because, in some way, the other has not been able to stay with us. What Parsifal did, bringing his presence and his care — that is really what is needed.

Reflection:

You might close your eyes for a moment, and bring to mind a time when you have been in some form of a trance of suffering — some form of a disconnect, feeling alone or hurt or confused — and you connected with somebody that had a

healing presence. It could be in a very subtle way you felt that connection, or it could be really one of those powerful moments in your life, but somebody who had a healing presence that you could tell was making a difference, was able to help you re-connect and come back into this mutual belonging — this web of life. And as you bring someone to mind – the Buddhists call it a benefactor – what are the qualities in that person that made a difference for you? What did that person embody or offer?

I often think about what is most needed from our parents in the earliest phase of life — in infancy and early childhood. There are two things, and you might have, in some way, had some of the language for these as you reflected on that person that made a difference for you. One of the qualities that we need from a parent is a sense that they understand or *get us* and that we are known in some way. *This being understands, this being is interested, this being is attuning.* The other quality is that, in that feeling known and understood, that we are loved and that there is care. These are often described as the two wings of awareness when they are in full bloom — the understanding and the caring. And we all need to receive and recognize these as the natural and intrinsic nature of our caregivers. It wakes us up.

Bringing these to our own inner life is what I sometimes think of as *spiritual re-parenting*; that what we are doing on this path of healing and awakening is bringing those two qualities of seeing clearly — *Oh, what is going on right here? What aileth thee?* — and caring, that gentleness, to our inner life and to each other and our larger world. I call it spiritual re-parenting because there is a corrective quality to it. The given is that there was some severed belonging. There is some delusion and greed and aggression that ends up getting in the way of us feeling loved. We all have this capacity in us to spiritually re-parent ourselves and each other, and we all need help.

So the inquiry is:

How do we awaken that presence? How we bring it to the wounded, ex-communicated, oppressed parts of our own being.

The starting place is that every one of us — *every one of us* — needs to feel loved. It seems incredibly obvious, but it is what we most forget. It's a core need biologically, psychologically, and spiritually. We get very occupied with what we think we want, but deep down we want to feel loved. We want to feel that loving presence which is what we are, but one of the first ways that we touch into that is

by feeling loved. There is so much research now on what happens when there is not a secure attachment with the caretaker, when that seeing and caring is not there. We look at rats. The rat mama licking her pups —that that licking and grooming is what allows the synapses to connect. We know that, in the very earliest phases of a young being's life, it is through the nurturing behaviors that we actually wake up our brain and get it functioning. From studies of monkeys, we know that erratic mothering is correlated with binge-eating, aggressive behavior, withdrawal, depression, anxiety. Look at all of us. To the extent that we have parenting that is kind of unsteady, we get anxious, we get depressed or we get addictive. It's all there. And it's societal — we all have some dysfunction to different degrees. But, when attunement and attachment is weak, it affects us. We see it in animals, we see it in humans.

Somebody sent me a few of these little cartoons. One has a parrot on a therapist couch and he is saying, "I want more than a cracker but I don't know how to ask for it!" In another, there is an elephant on the couch who is saying, "Sometimes, even if I stand in the middle of the room, no one acknowledges me!" Why did the chicken cross the road? The chicken responds, "My therapist says I should do more things that scare me!" The doughnut on the therapist couch saying, "I feel I am a very well rounded individual yet people say I am bad for them still!" You get the idea – we all have something.

I've been reading some fantastic studies about how our human relational strength is what really has allowed us to be peak survivors. It is now hypothesized that it was our need to communicate that actually most accounted for the phenomenal growth of the cortex in human development. It is through communicating, collaborating and relating that we have had our evolutionary success. Psychologist Louis Cozolino says, "We are not the survival of the fittest, we are the survival of the nurtured." *The survival of the nurtured*. Nurturing in human development is key. We have an elongated stretch of childhood and this capacity to feel related to others is what makes our intelligence grow. It makes us capable of empathy, compassion, collaborating, creating and fulfilling. So what happens is that we need to feel connected and then, of course, it is very imperfect. We all have our places of severed belonging. And what happens then? We go after substitutes. We need to feel loved. If we don't feel loved, we are going to go after something else. And the more we don't feel loved, the more we are going to grasp on to that — hence, addiction. So we have substitutes: "I don't feel loved – well, I want to feel admired then," "I want to feel approved," "I want to feel envied," "I want to feel esteemed," or maybe, "I want to feel in control," or "I want to over-consume."

One story of going after substitutes takes place on an airplane. A woman sneezes and then she takes out a tissue, she wipes her nose and then shudders quite violently for ten to fifteen seconds. This guy is sitting next to her, and he notices it but he just goes back to his reading. But then it happens again. She sneezes, she wipes her nose, she shudders. And he is really curious. What is going on here for her? When it happens the third time he finally talks to her. He says, “Okay so, you have sneezed three times, you wipe your nose, you shudder violently. Are you okay?” And she said, “Oh yeah. I have a rare condition. When I sneeze I have an orgasm.” Embarrassed, he says, “Oh, so what do you take for it?” And she says, “Pepper!”

So, we pursue whatever we can if we don't feel the love. We also have another approach when we don't feel loved and safe, and that is that, because it hurts, we protect ourselves from intimacy. We long for it, but we protect ourselves because we are afraid of getting hurt even more. If there is severed belonging, we try to prevent more severed belonging. How do we do it? We withdraw, we defend, we blame others, we make others wrong and bad.

You might remember this story. It's so good:

A little girl asked her mother how the human race appears. The mother answers, “Well, God made Adam and Eve and they had children and all mankind was made.” Two days later, the little girl asked her father the exact same question. His response was, “Well, many years ago, there were monkeys and from them the human race evolved.” So the girl is confused. She goes back to her mother and asks, “You know, how come you told me the human race is created by God and dad said the human race was evolved out of monkeys?” And the mother replied, “Oh dear! It is quite simple! He told you about his side of the family and I told you about mine!”

So we have these strategies when we don't feel loved. We grasp or we push away. The challenge with both of them is that, the more we react out of that wounded place, the less we are able to actually bring real healing to it.

The archetype of healing — of moving from that suffering and that reactivity to healing — is, in Buddhism, the archetype of the Bodhisattva, which is an awakening being with an awakening heart. Quan Yin, the Bodhisattva of compassion, is described as *listening to the cries of the world*.

So, the beginning of healing is recognizing that there is suffering going on — sensing the “ouch” of the severed belonging, and listening to that. And then, after

that listening, the bodhisattva of compassion responds with care. This is the model for spiritual re-parenting. Like the bodhisattva of compassion, something in us realizes: *Wow, I am hooked on substitutes. I have a habit of pushing people away. I have a habit of distracting myself on my iPhone and not really being in intimate relationship with others. Or: I have a habit of over-consuming rather than being present and showing up in a situation. Or: I have a habit of being so busy that it makes it really hard for people to feel like I am right there with them.* And then we recognize: *Oh, ok, that's the way I am avoiding intimacy. That is the way I leave presence.* Like Quan Yin, we listen to the suffering and then we can begin to find a pathway to bringing care. It can be really challenging because there is a lot of vulnerability or we wouldn't be leaving to begin with.

How do we begin to bring that loving-presence to ourselves? Instead of leaving and grasping and pushing away and losing ourselves in distraction, how do we begin to love ourselves into healing?

The first step, like Parsifal, is to begin to ask ourselves the question:
What is going on right now?

Reflection:

You might close your eyes for a moment. Wherever you are, whatever is going on, the beginning of becoming intimate with your inner life in this moment is to consider: *What is going on inside me right now?* Can you get under your thoughts? What is going on in your body or your heart? Is there a restlessness? Is there an anxiety? Is there interest? Is there sadness? So we begin by saying, “What’s going on?”

I have recently been inspired by an interview on Krista Tippett’s podcast, *On Being*, with a woman named Ruby Sales — a civil rights activist, theologian — an amazing woman.¹ I recommend the interview. She talks about this need for unconditional love that we offer to ourselves, each other, and our world as the essence of healing, and she describes this as this archetype — like the Bodhisattva archetype in Buddhism — as this loving presence she refers to as *black folk religion*. In the interview, she shares a line from one of the old spirituals, “I love everybody. I love everybody. I love everybody in my heart.” She described how, in her own life, she grew up in this black folk spirituality, but

¹ Tippett, K. (Producer). (2016, September 15). *Where Does it Hurt* [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from <http://www.onbeing.org/program/ruby-sales-where-does-it-hurt/8931>

she left it some to explore other ideas and, in a way, it seemed like she had left home — left her spiritual grounds. But two experiences that were really profound for her let her know that she had never really left — that conscious loving was really the centerpiece of her theology.

The first experience brings us right to how we bring these two wings — understanding and caring — to ourselves. She says:

“The defining moment . . . I was getting my locks washed and my locker’s daughter came in one morning and she had been hustling all night and she had sores on her body, she was just in a state — drugs. So something said to me, ‘Ask her, *where does it hurt?*’ And I said, ‘Shelly, where does it hurt?’ And just that simple question unleashed territory in her that she had never shared with her mother. And she talked about having been incested and she talked about all these things that had happened to her as a child and she literally shared the source of her pain. And I realized, in that moment, listening to her and talking to her, that I needed a larger way to do this work.”

Just like Parsifal, she said, “Ask that question. *Where does it hurt?*” That same question, “*What is going on inside me right now? Where does it hurt?*” Powerful beginning of intimacy.

She describes the second experience, saying:

“I was riding down the road one day to Washington DC after having been at a demonstration against the war in Iraq. And suddenly, out of nowhere, I started crying. And I realized that God had been with me even when I hadn’t been with myself. And those moments made me really begin to seek — to go back to thinking deeply about black folk religion and really wanting to develop, in a very intentional way, an inner life that had to do with how I lived in the world — this return to unconditional love, for the life that is within us, the life around us.”

This is the centerpiece of her theology. I was already familiar with the Parsifal story, and when I heard Ruby’s story about asking that question, it really landed in quite a beautiful way. I could think, in my own life, of times that people asked me a question, and really asked from a place of presence. In those moments, feeling that healing that comes when somebody really wants to know — that actually opened up something in me.

Reflection:

For a moment, close your eyes. And, in this pause, see if you can relax back, come right here. Feel that *here-ness* — your body sitting here, breathing, the life that is here. You might bring to mind a challenging situation that is going on in your life. Anything that feels challenging. And imagine somebody that you consider to be a caring person. Bring someone to mind that you know and trust is a caring person. Imagine them looking at you with care and asking the question: *Where does it hurt? Or: What is this like for you? What aileth you? What is going on? What is it like to be asked?*

This is the beginning. This is that first wing of spiritual re-parenting. *Where does it hurt? What is going on?* Just as the parent — if they see their child upset, angry, withdrawn — asks these questions, we begin to learn to ask this of ourselves. We begin to pause to say: *What is going on inside? What's happening?*

We have been addressing this on the individual thus far, but this is the same exact question that, if we widen the field, we can begin to ask of any population that is having trouble. If we really want to have a world where we are understanding each other and are there for each other and responding to each other, we need to ask the same question. *Where does it hurt?* Where does it hurt for this group or for that group?

Ruby makes a powerful point of this:

“That question: *Where does it hurt?* We need to address it to everyone, if we really want to understand each other.”

So we ask that question. In our white awareness trainings, we say: “Can I imagine, what would it be like being a person of color here in Washington DC where, if you are out in the streets, with the racial profiling that goes on, you are going to be very inclined to running into trouble? Or a mother of a son or a wife of a husband or a daughter of a father who could easily get arrested?” Or: “What is it like to be, right now, a Muslim in this country? Or to be an immigrant who might not be fully documented or might have some minor criminal infringement? What is it like to be any of these people right now?” *Where does it hurt?* Can our hearts really get that?

But Ruby goes even further in her conversation, saying that we have a *white spiritual crisis* going on in this country and that, in order to understand what is underneath the aggression and the anger and reactivity, we really need to ask that

question: *Where does it hurt?* And really *get* what it is like to be unemployed, or to be losing jobs to globalization. The Dalai Lama often describes the suffering of not feeling needed, not feeling relevant any more.

I'm reminded of the story I often tell of approaching a dog that is under a tree, and you are all friendly and want to pet it and then the dog lurches at you angrily. But then you see the dog's paw is stuck in a trap, and you go from feeling angry at the dog for being aggressive to a place of understanding – *Oh, you are aggressive because you are hurting.*

Where does it hurt? Can we ask that of everybody? Instead of making somebody a *bad other* – where does it hurt? Powerful question. So, for Ruby, this is the theology. Unconditional love. Finding out where it hurts.

Coming back to spiritual re-parenting. The parent asks the child: *Where does it hurt?* We ask ourselves: *Where does it hurt?* And then, once we have started tuning in . . . *okay, it hurts, I am feeling unloved, I am feeling unworthy . . .* the next step is to let ourselves feel it so that the caring comes alive. We can ask ourselves, “Where does it hurt?” and we might even get in touch with some loneliness, some feelings of shame, some feelings of being unloved by others. But the challenge is that we don't know how to be with those. We very quickly want to leave.

There's a story of a wise old sage who lived way out in the wilderness and the people going to seek wisdom from him had to cross through dangerous jungles and forests and so on to get there. And when they would arrive, he would swear them to silence and then he would say, “Okay, I have one question for you. What are you unwilling to feel?” *What are you unwilling to feel?* That is the question that, when we start moving towards it — to the hurting place — we don't want to feel it. So we exit. And we all have our exit-strategies.

The next step in our training of spiritually re-parenting ourselves is that, once we ask the question, then we need to learn to stay — to stick around. It's not so easy. So we might look at the different ways we leave — just noticing them, not judging them. We might notice how we get lost on the internet or over-eat or get over-busy. One of the main ways that we leave when things feel difficult is that we move into judgment-mode. *I shouldn't be this way. I am bad for being this way.* We blame ourselves. Or we judge others. We do them both. We get angry. If a child is angry, what do we do? Well, we stay with an upset, angry child until

they can get in touch with what it is they are really wanting. And we do the same thing when we are blaming, judging, and feeling angry. When we spiritually re-parent ourselves, we commit to staying with our inner experience, no matter what it is, as we get in touch with what those hurting places really want or need.

In the *On Being* interview, Ruby Sales says, “We talk a lot about what we hate.” In other words, we are very quick to go into our judgments about ourselves and each other. *I hate when it is like such and such!* She says, “We need to talk about what we love.”

For us to be social activists or for us to do internal healing work, if we stay with the judgment, *I hate myself for such and such* — even if we are behaving in a harmful way — we are not going to change. *I hate this society for the way it is such and such!* We are not ever going to change it. But if we can move into: *I hate it when it is like this, because this is what I care about. I want to see such and such happen* — then we have the energy for change.

One woman I was working with some years ago hated herself for binge-eating and was stuck in constant self-judgment, telling herself: *I have ruined my life with this.* In other words: *I have ruined my body, I can't be in a relationship, I can't enjoy being physical with another person, I am too self-conscious and disgusted in myself, I have ruined my life!* She was completely locked in.

So how does spiritual re-parenting come in?

Well, you start by saying: *Okay, so what is it? Where is the hurt?* Then: *Well, right now all I can feel is my anger and my hatred towards myself.*

We started there, with that hatred towards herself. I said, “Let it be as big as it is.” And it was really, really big, and then I asked, “Okay, so if you really open to it, what is the deepest thing you are aware of?”

“Well, it has deprived me of my life!”

“So what has it deprived you of?”

Then she started saying, “I want to feel connected and it keeps me from feeling connected.”

And I said, “Say more about that. What do you really want?”

“I want to be able to feel really close.”

“What does that mean? What would that be like?”

And it got right down to the place of feeling absolutely in communion. She was longing for communion. Most of her moments in life, she was saying, “I hate myself for the way I eat!” But, deep down, it was: “I am longing for communion.”

As we continued to work with this, I said, “Okay, let’s explore what would happen if you were in touch with that longing more, and you kept praying from that place and remembering and getting familiar with that longing.” And that became her practice. Every day she would meditate and she would get in touch with that deep longing to feel connected. From that place, when she would binge, she had more forgiveness because the more she remembered that she longed to feel loving-presence, the less she attacked herself. She began to be able to work with the addiction from a place of caring about her life rather than hating herself. We begin to spiritually re-parent ourselves from a place of caring about the parts that are having trouble.

And so it is, also, with our wider culture. Ruby speaks about *redemptive anger*, which is when you feel the energy of anger because you sense an opposition to what is healthy and healing and good. That’s healthy. But she goes on to say that if you lock into anger, and it gets targeted to blaming and making somebody bad, then it becomes toxic.

So how do we take the anger and judgment that we feel and have it be redemptive? She says, “Remember what you love — the anger is there because there is something you love that is getting blocked — then act from that loving.” Dr. Cornel West says, “Justice is what love looks like in public.”² We love ourselves into healing, and it’s not just our inner life. We have to love our world into healing too. *Where does it hurt?*

Thus far, we’ve looked at asking that question: *Where does it hurt?* Staying, feeling, being with the loneliness, the fear, the anger, the hurt —really being with it — and then learning how to really respond.

² West, C., & Ritz, D. (2009). *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud: A Memoir*. New York: SmileyBooks.

A really big challenge in spiritually re-parenting ourselves is that, to some degree — sometimes small sometimes large — there may be trauma, and it is very hard to stay with the place of rawness and hurt and fear in a way in which we truly can comfort ourselves. Often we try to be with the experience, and it just makes the emotions feel more intense . . .and the fear gets stronger. The last thing we will talk about in spiritual re-parenting is how we can be with the really raw, deep feelings that seem impossible to get close to.

You might remember the movie, *The Horse Whisperer*. Robert Redford, plays the role of a man who agrees to tame a traumatized horse, and the horse's name is Pilgrim. The trainer has created a very nurturing relationship with the horse. He has done the spiritual re-parenting. He has created trust — stabilizing, calming, soothing — a really loving presence. But, at one point in the movie, Pilgrim gets triggered by someone's cell phone and his trauma comes back and he contorts and writhes and runs off into the open pasture.

Imagine that you are trying to be with your experience and you are trying to bring some connection and healing to your inner life, and a traumatized part of you gets triggered and completely contracts and pulls away. You are feeling panicked, or an enormous amount of anger, or terrible pain. If you are like the trainer, or the parent, how do you begin to come into relationship with that traumatized part?

So, here is what he did. The horse is far in the distance, and this trainer kneels down submissively right where he is. He doesn't chase after the horse. He just stays where he is in a very humble and present way, just attending to what the horse is doing and needing from a distance. He is staying in connection, not chasing down the horse, but staying present and attending. *Okay, what do you need? What's going on?* He is asking those questions from a distance. He waits until Pilgrim is able to come into relationship with him and, after some time, Pilgrim slowly walks to where the trainer is kneeling. As he is coming closer, the trainer is incredibly present, gentle, still — just a receptive presence. Finally, Pilgrim lowers his head — the horse's sign of trust and submission and readiness. In other words, the trainer has attended and created a field that allows the horse to re-establish that trusting. And when that happens, the trainer gently strokes Pilgrim's head, so they are re-connected. And then he is, with one finger, able to guide Pilgrim back — to show him the pathway back to healing — and they can go back home to complete their training and Pilgrim's recovery.

So what does this mean for us? We have felt into the parts of ourselves where we're suffering. We've asked that question: *What's needed?* We've tried to be with what's here, and we've sensed trauma. We really stay and create that safe

space and we patiently, gently wait until there is enough calming so that we can do that stroking, that nurturing, that healing. This is the way out of the wasteland.

When we are in trance — all trance has to do with separation — we are cut off. We are cut off from this larger living, loving reality, and in a static, fragmented story that *something is wrong*. Trance. How do we wake up from it? There is some awareness in us that says: *Hey, what's happening? What aileth thee? Where does it hurt?* And then we deepen presence in a very gentle way — and this is the archetype of unconditional loving. We love ourselves back to healing.

I have been going back and forth some between loving ourselves into healing and loving the people around us and the wider society into healing. We are really called to do both. This is a short piece from Martin Luther King's speech, *Beyond Vietnam: A time to break the Silence*. It is very powerful. He says:

“This call for worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all human kind. When I speak of love I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response, I am not speaking of that force which is just emotional bosh. I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme, unifying principal of life. Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality . . .”³

Reflection:

Take a moment pause and arrive again right here. You might take a few full breaths to collect and gather your attention, inhaling deeply and a slow out breath, letting go . . . letting go. And again. Inhaling deeply, and a slow out breath letting go . . . letting go. Then letting the breath be in its natural rhythm. And, as you did earlier, you might bring to mind a part of your life right now where you feel there is some suffering, some difficulty. It may be where you feel disconnected or conflictual in a relationship with another person. You might feel suffering around what is going on in our wider society. It might be a sense of disconnection that is coming because of your own behaviors, ways you are down on yourself. It might be fears around health, money, something at work. Somewhere where you're struggling.

³ King, M. L. (1967, April 4). *Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence*. Speech presented in Riverside Church, New York. Retrieved January 7, 2017, from <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/beyond-vietnam>

And calling on that dimension of your being that is most awake and most caring — you might call it your awakened heart or your highest self or your future self — that which you are evolving into. Just, from that place, sense that you can ask yourself the question: *Where does it hurt? What is really going on inside?* Direct the question to the most vulnerable part within you. What most wants attention? And, as you ask that question, see if you can feel into whatever vulnerability is going on — the fears or the hurts — sense what is most calling your attention right now. Like that horse whisperer, really attending with sensitivity.

You might sense what the unmet need is. Remember that in all of our wounds, the deep part is really a sense of separation. What does that the vulnerability most need? Is the need to feel loved? To feel seen? Accepted? Held? To feel belonging to something larger? To feel safety? Understanding? What kind of connecting does this place most need? And from that awakened heart, from the highest self or future self, just sense that you can listen and feel with that vulnerability and begin to offer inward whatever nurturing is needed — like the horse whisperer — that gentle stroke.

And if it helps, you might put your hand on your heart. For so many of us, that can begin to create a relationship of re-parenting and healing that is so different from our normal way of relating to ourselves. Just to put your hand on your heart is this tremendous gesture of kindness. You might experiment with that. *Survival of the nurtured*. Can you offer that nurturing inwardly through some words? Maybe some loving message to your heart — to the wounded place, to the hurting place? As part of nurturing, you can imagine and sense the love of this universe — the light and warmth of the universe — moving through your hands into your heart. Let the nurturing in.

And from that heart-space that can then sense the potential of the healing — of the nurturing — you might bring to mind someone that is dear to you that is having a hard time, so you can extend it outward. One person that is dear, that is having a hard time. Just bring that person to mind, and imagine asking the question: *Where does it hurt? Or: What is happening for you? What aileth thee? What's going on?* And sense that you could bring that attention and that care to that person's vulnerability in whatever way that you can offer nurturing. And imagine what it's like for that person to feel you there, just the connection that opens up when you offer your presence to another — the warmth, the tenderness. Just feeling that heart-space that expresses nurturance and resting in that, sensing all beings as part of that heart-space.

From the Poet, Hafiz:

Admit something:

Everyone you see, you say to them,
"Love me."

Of course you do not do this out loud;
Otherwise,
Someone would call the cops.

Still though, think about this,
This great pull in us
To connect.

Why not become the one
Who lives with a full moon in each eye
That is always saying,

With that sweet moon
Language,

What every other eye in this world
Is dying to
Hear.⁴

Why not become the one who lives with the full moon in each eye that is always saying, with that sweet moon-language, what every other eye in this world is dying to hear...

Namaste and thank you.

For more talks and meditations and to learn about my schedule or join my email list, please visit tarabrach.com.

⁴ Hafiz. (1999). With That Moon Language (D. Ladinsky, Trans.). In *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz, the Great Sufi Master* (p. 322). New York, NY: Penguin Putnam Inc.