

TRANSCENDING ENVY, KNOWING LOVE

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There is so little contemporary dialogue about *envy*. It's become so pervasive that we don't even notice it and we don't talk about it. Envy is at work at so many levels of our human experience. It is rampant in the commercialism that is all over the mass media, and social media too. Practically everybody wants what other people have.

Envy has become so prevalent in our lives that it seems funny to talk about it. Everybody's thinking about that new car, new computer or flat screen TV. Almost every advertisement you see is appealing to your envy. It is so pervasive that we take it for granted that we should want something that we don't have.

For millennia, envy has been identified as an elemental issue of human character. It has been seen by the ancients as a pernicious disease of the mind and heart. While it is named as one of the seven deadly sins, it was addressed by Aristotle and many, many others long before Christianity.

I have no interest in shaming myself or anyone else for feeling envy. I just think that seeing how envy is at work in one's life opens the door to freedom. Maybe today is a good day to look right into the face of envy; a good day to stare it down, shed some light on it, and arrive out the other side of the experience.

When we have the courage to do that, we have the opportunity to see that envy is the shadow that is left when what truly satisfies the human heart is missing.

Across cultures and across time, philosophers, writers, spiritual teachers and ordinary people have addressed the havoc that envy creates in the human experience. A Spanish proverb makes this incisive comment:

Envy is thin because it bites but never eats.

Humanistic philosopher Erich Fromm says this:

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There is perhaps no phenomenon which contains so much destructive feeling as “moral indignation,” which permits envy or hate to be acted out under the guise of virtue.

Hmm. Envy and hatred dressed up as moral indignation...

In William Shakespeare’s play *Othello*, he speaks of jealousy. Over the ages, writers seem to have used the words *envy* and *jealousy* almost interchangeably, although sometimes the distinction is made that jealousy is when somebody else is envious of something you have, and you’re afraid they’re taking it from you. In any event, here’s what Shakespeare says about jealousy through the mouth of Othello’s advisor, Iago:

*O! beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on.*

Columnist Harold Coffin had this enlightening insight:

Envy is the art of counting the other fellow’s blessings instead of your own.

This is from Astrid Abauda:

I’ve spent most of my life walking under that hovering cloud, jealousy, whose acid raindrops blurred my vision and burned holes in my heart. Once I learned to use the umbrella of confidence, the skies cleared up

for me and the sunshine called joy became my faithful companion.

Scottish-born financial journalist B. C. Forbes, the founder of *Forbes Magazine*, simply said:

Jealousy is a mental cancer.

In *Henry VI* Shakespeare says:

*...when envy breeds unkind division:
There comes the ruin, there begins confusion.*

Having lived in intentional community most of my adult life, I know that there are viruses that can spread in a community of people—and not only physical viruses. There are viruses of the mind and heart that spread. Envy is one of them. One person infects another, and it spreads until the community discovers the inoculation for the virus, which is gratitude.

Here’s a quote from seventeenth-century author Robert Burton. He wrote a book called *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Melancholy is now an archaic word for “depression.” He says this:

Other sins last but for awhile; the gut may be satisfied, anger remits, hatred hath an end, envy never ceaseth.

The Bible says this about envy:

*For wrath killeth the foolish man,
and envy slayeth the silly one. (Job 5:2)*

*Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but
who is able to stand before envy?*

(Proverbs 27:4)

This quotation is from the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson in his 1941 essay *Self-Reliance*. He speaks about envy and its remedy:

*There is a time in every man's education
when he arrives at the conviction that envy
is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that
he must take himself for better, for worse, as
his portion; that though the wide universe is
full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn
can come to him but through his toil
bestowed on that plot of ground which is
given to him to till.*

We all have our plot of land to till; we have our physical bodies, our own human capacities. We have that field of creative endeavor in which we find ourselves, however defined. And it is as we create with what we have that something good comes out of it.

Author Giannina Braschi says:

The eradication of envy: gratitude.

Gratitude is being thankful for the people who are present in your life, your circumstances, for your own physical body as it is, your own life as it is. But it is also being thankful that you have a gift to give. You not only have that field that is yours, that ground to till, but you have the energy and creativity that is yours to bring

to that field. You have that unique spark of creativity that is yours.

It seems to me that a person who lives a life of service is never out of work, is never unemployed. There is always something to give, there is always service to offer. And for someone who's living a life of service, the means by which they may offer that service comes to them. That's certainly been my experience.

When I graduated from college I went off to live in intentional community. I've lived in some of the most beautiful places I can imagine.

I went off to live in the Catskill Mountains of New York where, come October, it was ablaze with glory—maple trees like a living flame, all over the hills. And a beautiful mountain lake. People pay millions of dollars to live in places like that. I shared something so wonderful with the people I was with. I lived at Glen Ivy Hot Springs in Southern California, right up against the Cleveland National Forest. I wasn't looking for a resort location. I was looking to live a life of service. But how beautiful!

When I moved to Sunrise Ranch in June 2000, it wasn't to go on a Rocky Mountain high. I wasn't looking for some kind of a Colorado experience. But here I am in Colorado. I have many people telling me what a beautiful place I live in, to which I can only reply, "Yes, I do." But it came to me as part of a life of service,

not because I sought a beautiful place in which to live.

The Creation story in Genesis tells of the remedy to envy. Or more accurately, it speaks to a reality that, if missing, leaves the door open for envy to walk right in. In Genesis, there are two tellings of the story of Creation. For the literalists, it must drive them nuts: how did man get created twice? But there are two truths that are being brought out. This is the second story, in the second chapter of Genesis:

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

How beautiful! There are such profound, archetypal images being evoked by these words. But what do they mean, and how relevant are they to us? On the face of it, it is a bit bizarre that there was a rib taken out of the side of Adam and a woman created out of that! What could the story possibly be saying?

The story is written from a man's perspective. I would like to speak to it from my own

experience as a man, though I believe it is true of anyone, man or woman.

In the practical world, we find friends and partners because we run into them in the physical world. Seemingly, we find them by accident.

I understand that there are practicalities involved in the experience of relationship. And I understand that if we are not willing to extend ourselves to other people, we may never have that experience. If we were to sit in a cave someplace and never contact anybody, we would never find friends, or a life partner.

But this ancient story is telling us something so profound that transcends this usual range of thought around relationship. It is saying that the people in our lives, and particularly those people who are close to us, are generated out of us. At a practical level that makes no sense. But at another level it *totally* makes sense. We create our experience of the people who come to be with us. And if we don't create it, they can never fulfill the role that they're meant to have in our life.

We are conjuring the people who are in our lives. They are being created out of our own life expression. And if they aren't, then you could bump into someone who might otherwise be your best friend, your soul mate, your wife or husband—and they will be meaningless to you. You won't begin to recognize them for who they are.

I could describe this in a way that somewhat diminishes the reality of what is happening. The lesser way to describe this reality is to say that we are creating the place for that person we are going to meet. For a man, the expression of a man's heart, the expression of his spirit, and his longing to have a feminine presence in his life makes a place for a woman when she shows up in his life. Through his own acknowledgment and appreciation of his own feminine nature a place is given into which a woman can come. She can be at home and feel appreciated in that space. The same is true for a woman: a man can occupy a significant place in a woman's life because she has created a place for him to show up.

As a practical matter, if a man has no appreciation for feminine qualities, then when a woman shows up he thinks, *What are you doing here?* If he notices her at all! He might think he's looking for a woman who will be a life partner, but it's never going to happen until something happens in his own Being.

But the reality of relationship is even more magical and mystical than that. Not to deny the reality of the other person, because they are a creator in their own right... But in a magical and mystical way, we are invoking their presence in our life through our own generation spiritually. We are creating them. We could think we are attracting them—the Law of Attraction at work! You might think that if you are expressing yourself in a way that is of a certain vibration and you are putting intention out there and doing all the things they

say you should do in *The Secret*, you are attracting the right person to be with you. But what I say is that even if you attracted the perfect person, if they haven't been created out of you, they will have no place to be, and you won't even recognize them, and they won't recognize you. The story of Adam's rib is saying that they are being created *from you*. Your true friends, partners and colleagues are appearing in your experience out of the generation of the truth of who you are, which is the same reality that is within all people, all Creation and all of Being. This doesn't deny their existence apart from you. But who they are *to you* and who they are in your life is generated out of you.

The story of Adam addresses a realm of relationship where envy can flourish. For most people, there is a great hole in the heart that they don't know how to fill. So they want something they don't have, and feel envy when they see other people who seem to have what they do not.

It is so easy to see somebody else and want what they have without appreciating the process of Creation that lets us have it. I don't see anything wrong with seeing somebody else who has something that we want. It might be money, it might be a relationship, it might be social status; it may be some kind of fame, some kind of job.

That's not envy yet. It turns to envy when we try to take from the world what we haven't created ourselves; when we don't ask

ourselves, *How do I create that according to the Laws of Creation myself? How do I have it for myself? And what are those Laws of Creation that create that fulfillment in a way that's unique for me? How do I harmonize with those Laws?*

Envy is at play when a person tries to take for themselves what they do not have and have not created for themselves. When they simply take it. From a legal standpoint, envy can end up as stealing. If we envy what somebody else has, we covet it—there's a quaint old word that goes along with envy. If we act on the way we covet what others have, it can end up as stealing. The word *stealing* is in common usage. But that is only the outer manifestation of something that goes wrong inside for so many people. Underneath stealing is envy—wanting something that you didn't earn through the process of Creation yourself. It may be in the context of a relationship that a person feels envy. But envy can relate to any of the experiences that are part of living a happy and fulfilled life.

Gratitude is a distinguishing quality of a creative person, because a creative person is manifesting out of a sense of gratitude, not out of a sense of lack. I'm creating what I'm

creating, not because I'm ungrateful for what I have and don't think I have enough. I am creating out of a sense of gratitude for what's been given to me in the world around me. But also gratitude for the tremendous creative gifts that are inside of me that I have to give to the world. I am grateful for the love that I have to bring to other people.

On a true spiritual path, we ultimately come face-to-face with the overwhelming love that is at the deepest place in the heart for each of us. We may feel emptiness up until that moment when we open to this great love. The emptiness disappears when we realize: *I do love people. I love them so overwhelmingly, when I actually get in touch with that love, I hardly know what to do. I have to figure out how I communicate to the people in my life and somehow tell them how much I love them. I am not looking for love. I am awed at the overwhelming love that's in me that wants out.*

Like Adam, we have the opportunity to create the fulfillment of our life out of the power of love within us.

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