

~ Love's Labour Lost? ~ Or, The Masquerade of Trauma as Love

"Doubt that the sun doth move, doubt truth to be a liar, but never doubt I love"

- Hamlet Act II Sc II

"Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, and therefore is winged Cupid painted blind"

- *Midsummer Nights Dream Act I Sc I*

"When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions"

- Hamlet Act IV Sc VI

"Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt"

- *Measure for Measure Act I Sc IV*

"The heavens give safety to your purposes! "

- *Measure for Measure Act I Sc I*

Quotes by William Shakespeare

"Thy dawn, O Master of the World, thy dawn;
For thee the sunlight creeps across the lawn,
For thee the ships are drawn down to the waves,
For thee the markets throng with myriad slaves,
For thee the hammer on the anvil rings,
For thee the poet of beguilement sings."

- James Elroy Flecker

Last month I wrote about endings to old passages and openings into new passages and opportunities. As in all things, the importance of good relationships for maintaining one's health and wellness is essential. While this would seem common sense, human beings are anything but common creatures.

Human beings do not exist in a vacuum. Our experiences inform us, affect us, and, at times, deceive us. What we see, hear and touch, and what we feel are not necessarily the same two experiences. The seeing/hearing/touching is the present input we receive, while our feelings are formed not only

in response to the senses, but also in response to a lifetime of experiences. And in some cases, a early and repeated trauma. The trauma of love.

A long time ago a small child grew up experiencing that saying "No" meant loss of love and acceptance. Saying "No" meant loss of relationships. Saying "No" meant you did not really love the one to whom you denied their request or demand.

This yearning for love was turned into emotional blackmail. The desire for love was no longer a matter of nurturing and growth and learning about relationships. No. This yearning for love became a tool – a weapon – to be used on the child to meet the needs of the caregivers / authority figures.

As the child grew, any demand had to be satisfied or "love" would be withdrawn. Relationships were an all or nothing affair. There was no in-between. Saying "no" would not only result in withdrawal of love and acceptance, but there would be the follow-on result of punishment, both physical and emotional.

What could possibly be the outcome of such experiences? The child became traumatized to the yearning for love and acceptance. As the child grew into adulthood, it would mean that those who could be friends would be kept at a distance. It would mean the yearning for love had an insidious danger, of reliving the trauma when she would say "No" to any demand from any authority figure, benevolent or not. The facts became secondary to re-experiencing the trauma of

~POINTS OF VIEWS~

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February 2007
Issue 14

saying “No.” And to avoiding closeness to avoid the trauma of “love.”

Re-experiencing such feelings and trauma can overwhelm even the best efforts to have good and loving relationships. The real danger is in becoming closer and ever more vulnerable. The pain is so raw and present and blinding. A pain no caring friend or therapist can get close to without risking getting burned as well. The trauma of “loving” is real and debilitating.

Is there no solution to this issue? Can we not fix this issue in 12 easy steps? Is there no medicine or formula? No magic spell that can enable the person to experience truly loving relationships without re-experiencing the trauma, pain, and punishment that is built-in to the experience of “love”?

And therein lies the problem. What the child experienced was not love. It was emotional blackmail. The child never learned what nurturing and love and acceptance were all about, since that was not the mechanism by which the family functioned. The child, then, as an adult, must try to learn and experience and ingrain in herself how to love without trauma. How to say “No” without the vile poison of feeling rejected within herself. Without the fear that no request can be denied without loss of “love.” And, lastly, without the “yearning for love” which causes this insidious process to recycle itself and reexperience trauma over and over and over.

There is only one way. And that is through, by placing oneself in a vulnerable position, feeling totally helpless and frightened, unable to satisfy anyone’s demands, and allowing another to give love and acceptance without strings. No status, no glory, no achievement. Helplessness and vulnerability are the only way to overcome the trauma of “love.” Being able to say “No” and allowing oneself to tolerate the experience that the love did not end up withdrawn and did not

go away. Being unable to respond to demands, and experiencing the open receipt of love.

This cure is the most difficult to experience. The most difficult to accept. For by going through one is forced to re-experience the trauma and be helpless to prevent it, all at the same time. It feels like being smothered and dying. And then to experience that true love is never based upon demands. And never based upon fulfilling one’s own needs. It is the genuine affection and kindness when two human beings care for each other – as friends, lovers, or spouses.

No relationship can ever survive the “trauma of love” for it is not love at all, but a violation of the innocent to fulfill one’s own unmet needs.

There is always hope. And there is truly love out there to be experienced. One must be willing to take the risk – to work with those who can help, even if it means being vulnerable, helpless and frightened all over again.

-Helen Hill, MA

**"The worst is not, So long as we can say,
'This is the worst.' "**

- King Lear Act IV Sc I

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