



Putting Down Pain

I want to begin today by reading a passage from Mark Nepo's book, *The Book of Awakening*.

"The time has come to put our stones down. For hands clutching stones can't freely drum and hearts fisting the past can't really sing."

He goes on to say, "It only took me a lifetime to learn but the lesson is as profound as it is simple. As long as we clutch to one thing, be it a stone, a rail, a weapon, our hands cannot open or reach for anything else. The timeless and essential drama of living into the unknown resides in this simple sequence. We must risk putting down the stone, the stick or gun we are grasping in order to build or touch or make music of any kind. It reminds me of a friend who wouldn't let go of his past. He clutched it like a rope and was afraid that if he let go he would fall. But as long as he fisted his history in this way, he couldn't embrace the love that was before him, and so he never healed. It is unavoidably true. Hands must be emptied, before they can be filled anew. It is the same with our hearts, it is why courage day by day is necessary."

I love this little passage. I especially love the part where he says about the past, fisting the past, not letting go of the past. I was thinking about this passage and it reminded me of my relationship with my father, which was not good. For decades, we had this bit of a battle, mostly a silent battle. I wanted him to be someone he wasn't. I wanted him to be emotionally available, and he wasn't. I wanted him to be more open and expansive, but he wasn't. He was rigid, he was judgmental, and he was very shut down. He suffered from depression and anxiety, like most everybody in my family, myself included. It was just not a good relationship. It was a very disappointing relationship. And I felt a lot of anger toward him for many, many, many years.

Every now and then, we'd try to address it, but he wasn't capable of addressing it. And, in a way, I was not capable either. This was because I was grasping onto the past. I wasn't able to see something fresh, something new, something else that might be available other than my rigid imagination, my rigid dream of what I wanted it to be. It kept me from experiencing what it could be.

It wasn't until the very last few years of his life, especially the last two years when he was dying of cancer, that we were able to move forward. I was spending a week, every other week, taking care of him for two years. During that time, and I can't tell you how I was able to do it, but I simply dropped my expectations of him. I dropped my rigid holding on to the past, of how it had always been.



I came to a place of acceptance within myself for him, for who he was, just as he was. Not demanding or expecting that he become someone I wanted him to be. What happened was almost miraculous, at least in my mind. I don't really think it was very miraculous. I think it was just the simple truth that when we open our grasp and accept what is, we simply come into alignment with whatever is happening and we are at peace with it.

So, I let go of my expectations of him. I believe that in turn he let go his expectations of me, his vision of me. We ended up having, in those last two years, the most remarkable, touching, simple, sweet connection that just blew me away. It was not this deep emotional connection that I had always wanted. Instead it was something very sweet and very tender, and as a result, we healed, I healed. When my father died, I was left with closure, real closure. As well as appreciation and gratitude and love for this man that I had been so mad at for 50 years.

We do that with each other now, don't we? We have expectations about the way things should be. We hold on to past hurts, that we tap into every time something happens, that keeps us from being able to have what is available in the moment because we're so attached to what's happened in the past or we are so focused on what we want for the future, that we miss the good, the true, and the beautiful in this very moment. Things that may be very simple and very sweet and maybe very tender and that could be enough.

So today, I want to invite you to open your grasped fists. I am also grasping onto things, especially in this world that we're living in right now with political unrest, social unrest, and more. There are some beliefs or some ideas about people who believe differently than me that I'm grasping on to so hard that it keeps me from feeling the love that I have. It keeps me from feeling the generosity and the compassion I have and the understanding I have.

So, I invite you, and I invite myself, to open our grasping, our holding on to these rigid ideas and beliefs which keep us separate from one another. This way we can experience what is available to us in this moment.