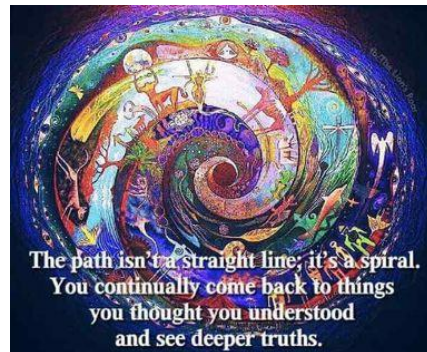


Spirals

By Lisa Browning

I've been hearing a lot about spirals in the last few days. I've talked about it before, although I'm not sure I've ever used the term "spirals." But after last week's dark night of the soul, I started thinking about it again.

I received the following meme from a friend:

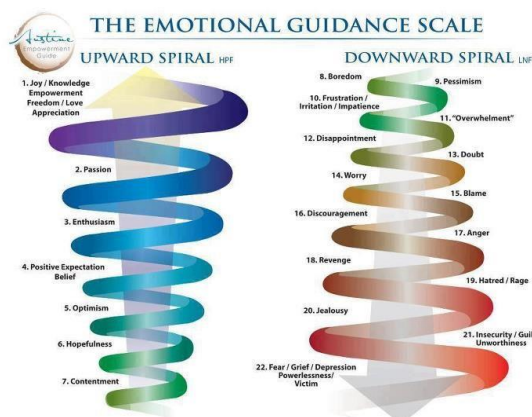


And I get that. I've always said that Creator/Spirit/God keeps trying to teach us what we need to learn, and if we don't listen, the messages get louder and louder. From a spiral point of view, we go deeper and deeper.

This happened to me last week. I won't go into the details because they're really not relevant at this point. However, I did take a really hard look at why those dark nights of the soul were happening so often. It was frustrating because, each time, I thought I had figured it out!

I looked at Joanna Macy's writing about spirals, the Emotional Guidance Scale by Abraham-Hicks, and several different variations of spirals as they relate to emotions and the spiritual/healing journey.

Nothing made sense, until very early this morning. I realized that I was looking at the spiral from a perspective that wasn't particularly helpful. Something more like this:



And I couldn't figure out how to get from the downward trend to the upward trend. (Yes, this is the type of thing I think about first thing in the morning!!)

And then it hit me. The two are not separate. The spiral is more circular, just like the first image above. And only we can decide when we want to get out. When we have learned what we need to learn.

Tony Robbins once said that we all reach a point where we realize that enough is enough. When we know with absolute certainty that things are going to be different. He happened to be on Oprah's Super Soul Sunday yesterday, and although I'd seen that particular episode before, I was compelled to watch it again. This time, that particular comment spoke volumes to me. My catalyst was the concept of love. Self-love, to be more specific.

In the process of trying to figure out the latest period of darkness last week, I had written the following on my facebook page:

As I sat in my living room this morning, I had a conversation with Spirit. Well, I talked! I said that I love my daughter and my grandchildren more than anything in this world, that I love my work ... and then it hit me. I love my LIFE.

All good. But something was missing. A friend replied to my post by saying something so simple, but so very profound:

And most of all you love you!!

Wow. I had missed that!

So, back to this morning. It was probably the first time, ever, that I have said "I love you" to myself and actually meant it.

So here's the amazing thing

I looked over at the wall right beside my bed, and was stunned to see this particular spiral:



It's been there for years, ever since I moved into this house. I bought it because of the butterflies, not because it was a spiral. But there it was.

Self-love is my answer (and what a perfect theme for the month in which Valentine's Day falls).

There is a space at the top/end of the spiral, and I plan to put the following photo there, together with the words "You are loved" ... as a symbol of my commitment to self-love:



I am not positive, because the photo is so small, but it appears that there are both butterflies and hearts on my sleeper!

No coincidences.

I *THINK* I'm OK

by Clay Williams

I have to admit that this article took me a long time to write. I put a lot of thought into it and I've chosen the language very carefully, because I think the things I'm writing about can be very subjective and I want to try to be as clear as I can be that I am speaking only from my own experience, my own knowledge. Please forgive my rambling.

When I was growing up, the medical community used to recommend that we get regular checkups, with the intervals being different for different conditions or aspects of our health, even if there are no symptoms or problems that we're aware of. If we're told to have a physical check-up, it makes sense to have a mental health checkup as well, right? OK, so here goes.

For most of my adult life I've thought to myself that I'm kind of "normal" and "healthy" and average, and that there are tons of people just like me. And why wouldn't I? Most of the things around me supported that view. I grew up in a little northern Manitoba town, where it was normal to have a Mom and a Dad, it was normal to be punished when you did something wrong, it was normal to have some little thing that made you at least a little different from everybody else. And everyone I knew grew up in that same little town. Through my teenage years, we moved to bigger and bigger towns and I met people who had grown up in small towns and in similar circumstances. There were lots of people around me who appeared to be in a similar situation that I was in, so I guess when it's related to a person's life or lifestyle, my original definition of normal would be something like: "conforming to the things I saw as a kid, and the ways that people reacted to those things."

My physical health has been generally good, with a few injuries here and there, and a few "complaints" as I get older. The physical health of others is something we can often see, and something that people are usually willing to talk about, there's not often an associated stigma. Over the past ten years, I have volunteered at aid stations during ultramarathon races. I especially enjoy being at an aid station through the night for 100 mile races, and helping the runners after they have been on their feet for 16, 18, 20 hours. The part I enjoy most is hearing people's stories. These athletes who are confident enough to be at the starting line of a 100 mile footrace often have a story about recovering from or overcoming some devastating illness or injury or trauma. If you were to meet any of them on the street, you would never know of the struggles and darkness that they have endured. Even our physical injuries are not always clearly visible or evident, so we can never assume that our emotional injuries or illnesses are visible either.

My mental health has been average, I guess. Normal. That means "healthy," right? As I was growing up, people didn't talk much about the things that make them anxious or about any emotional state other than anger or happiness, so I assumed most people were like me, and because of that similarity I think I'm healthy. But I've been thinking more during the past couple of years about that definition. When it's related to mental health, what is "healthy"? For a long time my engineering mind wanted to know if there was a threshold, a certain level of thinking or

feeling that clearly defined healthy and unhealthy. But like many things in life, as I learned more about mental health, I began to discover how little I knew, and how complex the question of mental health was.

For the first twenty years of our marriage, my wife's normal condition included strong peaks and valleys of emotion, and we thought that frequent crying and loud angry arguments were normal parts of life. After admitting that wasn't healthy, she was ready and willing to seek and receive help. The point here is that we simply didn't know what "healthy" and "unhealthy" meant. I found a very helpful definition in a brochure from the Mood Disorders Society of Canada. It's pretty normal to feel stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, or anger as part of our response to situations. It may be a disorder when symptoms are persistent over time, and interfere with a person's ability to study, socialize and manage daily tasks. This simple definition has been really helpful in understanding and "defining" how I feel.

So that's a really long way of saying that I've done my own checkup, and I think I'm ok. Even with that, I have to say that I always keep something in mind: "When you're in a dark place, talk to someone you trust." We don't always need to see a doctor when we're hurt, but getting some help from someone we trust, someone who we know has our best interests at heart and would not intentionally hurt us, can do a lot of good, even with the things that we think or only small.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ALZHEIMER'S by Christine Nightingale

Strictly speaking, dementia of any sort reduces the capacity of the affected individual to cope with the ordinary challenges of life. Due to a reduced capacity to think clearly, remember things, and understand social skills, their lives are radically altered.

Yet how that looks in the finer details seems to have everything to do with the individual person who is affected by this condition.

Within my family of five siblings, two of us have developed dementia. As the older sister in the family, I seem to have taken on some of the communication and caregiving function with these two siblings. And what is interesting to me is how radically different my brother and sister are in their current daily lives. They are still essentially the same people they have always been...with an overlay of an extra challenge.

My older brother Ernie was always a kidder, fun-loving, physically active, with a tremendous sense of fun and optimism. As a talented builder, he built his own home in a Maine rural area, with accompanying dock. He built a home next door for his middle son and his family, and taught him his business. Ernie built up a successful dock-building and dock-maintenance business on a lake where 120 families had summer cottages. Ernie taught his son David all the details of the business, including building docks, bringing them in for the winter, and putting them out in the spring.

When Ernie developed dementia, there was an almost seamless transition of responsibilities. David gradually took over more and more of the work of the business, and David's wife took over cooking for Ernie, shovelling snow, and whatever else needed to be done at the house next door.

When I make my weekly phone call to Ernie he is always cheerful and happy, as he always has been. He is more or less oblivious that he no longer runs his business or his life. He no longer drives his truck, motor boat or motorcycle, but he does not remember this fact. He accepts the changes to the extent that he is aware of them.

No one uses the term Alzheimer's. No one makes a point of letting him know that he is no longer in charge. Last week I reminded him of the names of his other kids and grandkids, and asked him to write them down, and maybe call them if he felt like it. But the great blessing is that he accepts that "old people get forgetful," and that his needs are taken care of by family.

My sister Ann is in a completely different situation. She has had mental health issues all her life, has always been grumpy, with low social skills, and does not like people very much. When she started to show signs of dementia, I quickly started looking for a group home which would be able to take care of her. It took fully nine months of daily phone calls and emails applying to every care home in the Greater Toronto area, before a spot became available. The facility is

excellent, with delicious meals (always available if desired by visitors who come at mealtime), caring staff, and plenty of activities.

I call Ann once a week also. It is a completely different scenario, though. Ann is not interested in having a conversation. She does not choose to engage in most of the activities, just spends her time wandering about the halls or lying in bed.

I send weekly care packages (clothes, books, chocolates, art supplies) but Ann never thinks to say thank you.

In short, her basic personality is the same as it always was with an overlay of Alzheimer's. This makes meaningful or pleasant interaction almost impossible .

Whereas I can and do look forward to my conversations with my brother.

Before having this experience with my own family, I would not have known that dementia just seems to accentuate whatever personality traits the person had before. So apparently in some cases, those with dementia can still have pleasant conversations and interactions. In others...apparently depending on their previous personalities ...this is not possible.

I of course realise that the situation will only worsen for both of them. One of my healthy brothers handles the financial aspects of caring for my sister's needs; the other sometimes calls our brother with dementia , who is pleasant to talk to. The important thing about dementia ...as with mental illness... is that all family members are ultimately affected by caring for their loved ones' needs.

Silver Linings

by Colleen Heighington

As I am writing this in early January, things are pretty much the same. The malls are shut down, traffic is sparse, churches are closed and the streets are nearly empty except for the walkers and joggers like myself making full use of them.

I have realized that the mall for me has been my lifeline and being mostly a mall walker, I have really missed it and I know a lot of others that do as well. I so much rely on the weather these days for walking and because I am no spring chicken anymore, I need to walk with care. So far, so good as the weather hasn't been too bad and keeping my fingers crossed, I sure hope that it continues. Lately, I have been on the phone a lot talking to my family and friends as getting together with them is a big no no.

Things that we once took for granted have been taken away from us since the onset of Covid 19 and that in itself is so sad. My heart goes out to the seniors that are in lock down and feeling so isolated. My uncle who is nearly 90 has told me that he is very lonely so I have been calling him frequently to stay connected and help fill some of his lonely days. We are having some great conversations and enjoying each others company. Also, my heart goes out to the students. My two grandsons are staying at home and doing on line learning. So far, so good but they do miss seeing their friends and hanging out. My son has not been at his program since last March and to our surprise, he is doing very well. He keeps himself busy by going on his computer, listening to music and going on walks with mom. He phones his friends to stay in touch which brings much happiness into his day.

Regardless of the great concern over Covid 19, I have seen some small silver linings to it. I am now saving a lot more money since not walking in the mall and my husband is most pleased with this!!! I am now able to walk across the road with no problems since the traffic has condensed down so much and that is a treat in itself as I live right across from the mall and the traffic before was always so busy. I am getting a lot more fresh air these days which is so nice and refreshing and been able to do all of my three walks daily as the city has been on top in keeping the roads and streets safe for everyone. I feel a lot closer to my family and friends by talking to them over the phone on a more regular basis. Even though there are tight restrictions for the residence of the elderly, I have been told by my uncle that his nurses and staff have been most kind to him and been looking after him very well and with regards to schools, things seem to be going quite well and I salute the teachers, staff and of course the students for this. Great Job!!!

In closing ... we are still waiting for the Big Silver Lining to Covid 19. Sometimes it comes around quickly and other times, it takes time. So let us all continue to do our part

and to stay positive and to always have Hope and in Gods time and way ... it will be here ...

Because He has the Whole World in his hands!!!!



TO ME - FROM ME, Happy Valentines, Girl!

What better time than now to show a little love! Too bad it's just once a year... or, could it be more often?

Well, maybe it should be and this could be a practice run at what it might feel like in greater frequency and abundance.

Meanwhile, we could begin by asking “Why am I so special anyway?”

Typically we are all unique, after all, even I know deep down there's no one quite like me, at least that I've met so far, and until that happens, I'm the one. Perhaps I don't give the matter enough thought because I'm so busy comparing myself to others that I don't see the real me...

**I've got my 'issues' and oddities and who hasn't?
Although I tend to focus on my own faults – which often aren't the easiest to love! You might do the same to some extent.**

So here's a suggestion:

Perhaps this Valentines, you should take yourself out on a private 'date', to look a bit deeper to see if there's not more of you, well, to love....

Everyone is worthy of love. That little person in each of us already knows that, and would like us to believe that, too ... And in fact, that little person really does deserve it – no matter what! No one can be all bad!

You see there's a difference between being bad and feeling bad; and I think we sometimes get the two confused by believing that if we *feel* bad – we must *be* bad. Not True! Make a note of that would you, and put it on your mirror to see every day. It's far too easy and hurtful to make the wrong assumption, especially if we're sensitive.

Feeling bad is very normal and human and can be taken much too seriously.

So, what better time to be reminded of that than this Valentine month. In fact rather than being celebrated for one day, I propose it be extended the whole month because most of us could use a lot more of it, don't you think? Self care is in such shortage.

There are two kinds of love. The one we get from others and the one we give to ourselves. And frankly I believe we could all benefit from a lot more of each which is another reason the celebration should be longer perhaps half a month, for each.

As you know, being loved is so much different than loving oneself. It seems more special, and yet, is it really? Lets look at it for a moment.

There are often a lot of conditions attached; so I wonder if that love is really the better one in the long run. Wouldn't it be a lot easier to set and meet our own standards for self-love than to turn over that major responsibility to someone else? I know easier said than done. And that seems to be one of our harder life lessons.

So why is that? I'm sure many a fish has often asked the same question, after it's too late. Not everything is always what it appears. But we're not fish. We have the opportunity of time and experience to learn that lesson which is never too late if we're willing to work lovingly and creatively to change it.

You see it's never too late to start to love yourself. You deserve it and those around you do, too. So here's the point: why not this Valentine's month – opps, I mean day, be generous by giving yourself the gift of love: "To me – from me."

Why not start by taking a genuine loving interest in yourself and choosing one or more of the things you like most about yourself – to begin to really love about yourself. And while you're at it, develop and expand those wonderful qualities of yours to keep the love going and growing. After all, it's worth it and more importantly you're worth it. Remember that. And what better time and place to start than right now?

Start by giving yourself the gift of your own undivided attention. Take an interest in the lovable person you are, and the more lovable person you can become, with your own love to honor and to hold on to in both good times and bad.

Start with a plan you can follow one step at a time. After all it's you we're talking about, and you should be the one in charge of setting your own short term goals. Begin simply.

Start off by choosing easy and natural characteristics, maybe your kindness and caring. There's no need to jump over tall buildings in a single leap! Walk around the building first – then a few times and feel good about that! One small step at a time. Loving yourself should be fun. And be sure to reward yourself. We don't do enough of that and that's a mistake because the whole point of this 'gift' is to give yourself the love you deserve. So be gentle and constant. You can never and I said never, give yourself too much love, because most of us weren't given enough of it in the first place!

SO lather it on, and like any great romance keep it between you and yourself before making any plans for the grand announcement and believe me, you won't have to announce it, because the change in you will do it for you, with gusto!

And I think you'll find that this will be a special gift that will keep on giving to both yourself and to those around you for a very long time to come. It could be the beginning of a very special love affair!

SO this year, why not make Valentine's – in the midst of a pandemic the best Valentine's gift of love you ever received from yourself!

**From me – to you!
With love,**

Happy Valentines.

