

Learning to honor ourselves

by Connie Brisson

My Mom was one of the most generous and kindest people I've ever known. She would give you anything that she had.

She enjoyed going on senior gambling trips and once, when she was in Saskatchewan in a casino playing on a machine with a tub full of quarters at her side, someone beside her started taking coins from her.

Most people would have looked up and stopped the person, but not my Mom. Instead she just ignored the person and kept on playing.

Well, the mystery person turned out to be her sister from Calgary, who coincidentally just happened to be there (on a different senior's trip). Of course when my Mom saw that it was her sister, the two of them had a great laugh.

When we heard the story later, I asked Mom why she had not done anything and she just shrugged and said: "Well, I thought that if someone needed the money that bad, they could have it."

That was my Mom. I saw this quality in her as nothing short of saintly and a high virtue to try live up to.

At her funeral, however, one of my brothers said something that made me realize how we all see the same things differently. He said that my Mom treated everyone like they were kings, always in service of others, because she felt that everyone was much more important than her (so she didn't often consider her own needs).

It surprised me because I had not ever viewed her generosity in that way. But, afterwards, I saw that both our versions held some truth.

We all grow up learning that it is good to give, be kind, generous and helpful. But no one tells us how to do it with balance and still be true to ourselves.

I learned this years ago after I'd gone for my second invitro. After I came home, I felt great. A few weeks later a friend of mine was having a product home party. I really didn't feel good that evening, but I forced myself to go because I thought that it was really important to support her. When I got to her place, there were 30 people there (*but then*, I didn't want to be rude and just leave either). Then by the time I got home that night, I could tell that something was

not right and, afterwards, I knew that night was the turning point for the pregnancy. When I later found out that I was no longer pregnant, I was devastated and so angry at myself for not honoring myself first that night. Would it have made a difference? I'll never know. It was a very hard lesson.

We're all taught that taking care of ourselves first is selfish, especially if we are women, although we're all socialized to please others. Part of our self-worth comes directly from our degree of self-sacrifice. When we love others, it's natural to want to help them and put their needs above ours.

When I was first introduced to the idea that it was alright (actually, crucial) for everyone, including me, to follow my heart and do what I wanted and what felt right for me *first*, before what anyone else thought or wanted, it felt like sheer blasphemy. I thought the gods would send thunderbolts.

But then it started to make sense to me. If we're all here to evolve, to become the highest versions of ourselves, how can we ever do that if we

are busy spending most of our time focusing *outside* of ourselves, on the desires/needs of others? If each one of us is an important thread in the fabric of life, then it's important for me to be completely me and for you to be completely you.

When we're trying to please someone else, then we've really stepped off our truth/path and entered onto someone else's soul path. You or I can never be what someone else 'needs' us to be. It will never, ever work.

How do we know when we are on our soul's path? When we feel/look inside, ask: "What do I feel is the right thing for me in this moment?" and then move in that direction. If our decision makes us feel brighter inside, happier, more alive, then we are honoring ourselves.

If we could all get to a place where we could each honor what is right for us, we wouldn't judge others and get angry about other people's choices. We would understand how crucial it is for each of us to follow our hearts.

I wonder who my Mom would have been if she would have honored herself and her dreams first. I just can't help but wonder what other gifts I would also have learned from her if she had the chance to really shine her light... I'll never know.



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