

The Gift

BY MARIANNE STREICH

YEARS AGO DURING an especially stressful time in my life, I often found myself mentally recycling issues like a CD on endless repeat, with no resolution in sight. At such times, I would call a friend; he would come to my house, and we would sit facing each other on a rug in front of a wood-burning fire. My words might pour out, or come in agonizing fits and starts. Often it took me a long time to say what needed to be said.

No matter how the words came or how long they took, my friend sat quietly, making eye contact, not speaking, his body language telling me that I had his full attention. When I had finished talking, he continued to sit quietly for several minutes, following the Navajo tradition of giving me an opportunity to add something I may have forgotten and him an opportunity to digest what I had said. And then he would speak. His perspective was always thoughtful, insightful, cogent, and wise.

Hearing myself speak the words that had been cycling through my mind obsessively and having him truly hear them and bear witness that he had heard and understood, helped me to gain clarity about the situation, open to my own wisdom, and reach a resolution. I count his gift among my greatest treasures. I wish I could say that I always give it to others. All too often, I want to interrupt another's story to share a similar one of my own, or give advice that the person hasn't asked for, or judge their choices, decisions, or actions.

Listening is an important component of my Reiki practice. I allow time prior to and following a treatment for the client to share anything he or she may wish to share. I strive to remember that it is often through hearing our own words that we come to clarity about a situation, that each of us has our own wisdom, knows our own truth, and has the solutions to our problems within us. Sharing what is in our hearts and on our minds is most often simply a need to be heard so that we can arrive at our own truth; rarely is it seeking advice or wanting someone else to solve our problems.

As a Reiki teacher, I admonish my students never to give advice outside of their areas of expertise, e.g., avoid offering medical advice if they aren't medical professionals or attempting to analyze a client or lead them through self-analysis if they are not licensed counselors. However, when we offer advice to someone who hasn't asked for it, we are also stepping outside our area of expertise. We are assuming a position of authority as an expert on that person's life. We are failing to honor their process or trust their wisdom.

Invariably, I think I am helping when I offer advice; however, giving advice that hasn't been asked for actually diminishes the other person. I send the unspoken message that he or she




isn't capable of solving their own problems, that I am wiser and know better than they how they should live their life. If I attempt to manage or direct their actions, I insinuate that they are inept or weak. If I insist that they should do something my way, I am trying to control them.

There are times when it is completely appropriate to give advice. A client, friend, or family member may seek me out because they believe I have wisdom that may shed light on an issue or situation they are experiencing. Maybe they are aware that I have had a similar experience and want to know how I handled it, or they may know I have knowledge about a particular subject. At such times, I am honored to share my wisdom.

I believe that certain responsibilities accompany my sharing:

- To be fully present and listen intentionally, without interrupting, and then to thoughtfully consider my response.
- To avoid giving advice outside my areas of expertise.
- To say I don't know if I don't.
- To release attachment to whether or not the person follows my advice.
- To refer the person to another professional, if indicated.

I also have a responsibility to myself. And that is to avoid being drawn into the drama of the person's situation or enabling someone who wants me to solve their problems for them. If it becomes obvious that compassionate listening is not helping the person move forward, and they are simply hitting replay and continuously repeating the same story, then I disengage in a compassionate way. I may say something like: "I can see that this situation is still troubling you and that you're having difficulty reaching a resolution. It might be helpful to seek the counsel of your minister or another professional who could help you sort through it in a way that I cannot."

For me, winter is a season of going inward, of deepening self-discovery, and of remembering. I remember the gift my friend gave me that winter long ago, and I re-commit to listening intentionally, sharing thoughtfully, and giving advice only when I am asked. 

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You are invited to share your Reiki wisdom in this space as well. Articles are to be a maximum of 500 words and should be submitted as Word documents by email to: GTMFR@reiki.org