

Fear, Love and Your Sphere of Caring.....
October 2006 newsletter

Can love (defined as a sense of basic warmth and care) replace fear as the basic operating principle for human beings? As we experience the pain of both international hostilities as well as our personal/interpersonal conflicts, isn't this the most essential question?

Put another way, we can ask, how far does one's sphere of caring extend? Would the Israeli government have had a different strategy in southern Lebanon if there were a few thousand Israeli families living there? Would Hezbollah have fired missiles into northern Israel if fellow Shiaa were worshipping in a mosque there? Would the U.S. have changed its approach in Iraq if thousands of American children were living there? Would an angry person, striking out at another, behave differently if in a reflective state of self-remembering? Imagine a person full of hateful inner comments suddenly hearing the same statements made aloud to their child.

We can look through history and be amazed at the good, kind fathers and mothers who could be completely ruthless when relating to people outside of their family. Looking within, into our own thoughts, feelings and behaviors, we can be stunned by the frequency of violence directed toward our self and others. The self-negating, life-defeating habits of mind are so familiar that we assume that this attitude is simply natural.

Any member of a tribe, religion, culture, gender, etc. who is more identified with that group than with 'Life' or at least 'humanity', will eventually create an 'us and them', with the 'them' being banished to the world beyond one's sphere of caring. Think of the football fan who can passionately defend a stranger who wears the same jersey while doing violence to a fan of the other team.

How far does your sphere extend? This question relates to all phenomena: thoughts, feelings, actions, words, deed, events, people- i.e. all 'arising' in the field of one's perception.

Who or what deserves banishment from your sphere? Is it Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney? Is it Osama Bin Laden?

When is one's lover, child, dog, friend, or opponent cast out beyond that line? When do we punish through withdrawing our love?

What are the inner voices- thoughts, feelings, memories- that are exiled from your warmth and kindness? Is it a feeling of despair or perhaps malice that is excluded? Where does one draw the line around their sphere of care?

For most of us, it is difficult to imagine a world in which all phenomena, even the 'negative' and 'evil' are met with basic warmth. Perhaps the mind objects to this view with the concern that caring for all 'arising' results in the empowerment or support of life-defeating thoughts and behaviors. Is this so? Can one make helpful distinctions and choices without violence? "Of course," is the resounding answer!

Personally, I am very interested in living with these questions. Noticing the closing of my heart, the physical contractions, the mental rejections, I always uncover fear at the root. Saying hello to this fear in it's mental and physical manifestations seems the surest way to moving from fear to love as the basic operating principle. Will you join me in this inquiry?