

The Valley of Quiet.

My daughter, unilaterally and without telling me, blocked me from contacting her in all ways. She's turning forty years old this December. After an eighteen-month absence, she decided to contact me. The chatty email detailed how she and her family had moved from Maryland, more than a year prior, to within five hours of where I live, and she ended her email by asking me to donate money to finish building a sailboat she and her husband and daughter were refitting. She wrote that the project needed two hundred thousand dollars, but, she noted, even ten thousand dollars would be helpful.

After a day, I wrote back and said I didn't want to participate. A couple more emails went back and forth. I tried phoning, but no one answered.

Then, an email arrived with what I can only describe as containing all of her pent-up frustration and hatred. This particular communication was personally offensive and directed towards me, and despite the relative shortness of words, reading through such negativity took me more than three attempts, as I needed to stop to breathe and to rest my confused brain and breaking heart. Finally, firing from a range from which she could not miss, her finger on the triggers for both barrels of the emotional shotgun she held and aimed, one barrel at my head and the other at my heart, she pulled the triggers. Her words tore into and through me, leaving me terribly wounded. Had she suffered a schism, a mental breakdown? Was she on medication, and had she suddenly stopped taking it? I wondered about all these things.

She critiqued everything about me, and her critique was wholly negative and presumptuous until finally, with an arrogance and naivety that belied her 39 years, she stated that I was bad at doing everything I did and that I was such a terrible person no one wanted anything to do with me.

Finally, and arriving near the end of her words, was this, “What have you done for me lately to show me you love me?”

The day I got blasted was not a good day for me, and I awoke the next day with a dreadful headache. I assigned that day for weeping and sleeping, and though I didn't physically weep, I did emotionally. I mainly kept to myself as is my norm; I slept, drank coffee, and drank wine earlier than usual to numb the pain.

On the third morning, I finally managed to read through the entire email, and afterward, during my morning meditation, I decided to walk into the valley of quiet.

I closed my eyes.

Outside, I could hear several construction workers driving past in their old, loud trucks on their way to work. I hear the roar of a Harley Davidson and the not-so-distant sound of a stump grinder and chipper being used at a nearby property, which could all distract me, but they don't because I am listening for the quiet. It's there. I hear it during the lulls of noise and concentrate on that. I tell myself, “Don't let the noise take hold of your attention and lead you. Keep listening for the quiet.”

I don't allow the ringing phone to make me wonder who it is or what they want; I listen to it without becoming attached.

I hear the soft crackling of logs burning in my woodstove and the even fainter ticking of the clock on the mantle. I am not distracted from listening for the quiet.

A small herd of six deer coming for their morning feed does interrupt me, so I go outside to feed them, but they are so peaceful and calm that they're not an interruption.

I go back inside and resume my meditation, only to notice that I have already descended to the floor of the valley of quiet. As I walk, I realize I no longer need to listen for the quiet because I have entered it. Ah, the absolute and total pleasure I feel being in the valley of quiet.

As I recall the nasty email and its effect on me, I smile from the depths of the valley of quiet.

The wounds from the double-barreled emotional blasts are self-healing here. The need to defend myself from the emotional assault dissipates, and the quiet encases me like the warmth from the sun as it breaks through fog on an early summer's day. I feel comfortable, too. The judgments imposed on me and the conditions demanded for our relationship to continue by my daughter fall from me like water off a plastic raincoat.

My daughter can plug a cord from her into an invisible port on me.

Here, in the valley of quiet, I am free from the demands of others. Because it's quiet, no one tells me what to do or how to do anything.

Walking through the valley of quiet, I remember I can unplug the cords others have plugged into me. As I do, I notice the unconscious but ongoing, loud conversation my daughter and I are having immediately stops, and I instantly match the quiet around me.

I stop walking because this is my destination.

I open my eyes, and I feel good. The weight of trying to figure out what, if anything, I should do next is gone. There is no need to continue defending the mean insults from someone holding a shotgun while I came unarmed and in peace.

I decide it's best to stay in the quiet valley and enjoy feeling good.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © March 2024