

WITNESS

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Why do so many people feel alone even when they have caring friends, work colleagues and family? You can feel 'alone in a crowd' even in a familiar crowd because of the lack of WITH-NESS. WITH-NESS is a specific kind of care, in which you feel someone or something is accompanying you in your feeling. With-ness has a different quality than a sweep of empathy or sympathy because it offers the perfect note of understanding. It can be a blend of the right words, feeling and a touch of a heart offering or any one of these elements that feels a lot like music as it captures and communicates something important and reaches deep inside you. WITH-NESS can happen in an instant; you just know.

My mother was frantically serving roast chicken and salad at a family dinner. Everyone was talking over one another. Six energetic people flailing and shouting and one guest, Larry, a very nice man my father worked with, was calm and gracious. I was twelve years old and feeling tired because I was having trouble sleeping. I would sit up for what felt like hours in the middle of the night talking with our dog, reading, doing art work. I cannot remember much conversation at the dinner except for one fragment of what I said, "I can't sleep at night." As the chicken legs were good-naturedly flying, Larry turned his full attention to hear me, "Why are you having trouble sleeping? Are you worrying?" He asked.

I don't remember what I said but that moment when Larry stepped into my experience, will be with me forever, evidently. I could feel that he knew my distress. There was a knowing in his eyes and expression and he got it, he got me, in a genuine moment of 'WITH-NESS'. It was a piece of love that was usable.

Usable love happens when care really beams through and reaches another person. Beloved pets are 'beloved' for this reason.

I once raised an eyebrow in a gesture of support to an eight year old girl in a restaurant vestibule. Her mother was insisting that she put her scarf on, while she protested that she wasn't cold. Some people have different thermometers and it didn't feel cold to me either and wisely the girl politely said that she would put her scarf on if she needed it. I didn't mean to intrude but somewhere in the third or fourth round of 'you have to wear your scarf', my eyebrow got the best of me and it signaled to this girl that I got her experience. As I was leaving she raised her eyebrow at me and smiled.

Some years ago, I witnessed a friend's conversation with her daughter. Speaking in a hard, frustrated tone, the mother sputtered,

"You know I love you!" To which her daughter painfully replied, "I know you love but I can never feel you love me."

Hearing this was rough. This mother and daughter love each other but the

'with-ness' factor was definitely off. Knowing it and receiving are on two different tracks. This is why you can know something in your head but be unable to change the feeling in your gut. This mother was an organized almost cut and dry type while her daughter was ethereal and artistic. They were moving through the world and relating on a different wavelength and both of them were hurt and angry because of all the missed connections. Just because you are blood related, there is no guarantee that you are cut from the same cloth.

With effort, a weak 'with-ness' match can be developed as you learn enough about the other person to join them in their experience. You need a willingness to set aside your natural preference and tune in and get specific with where and how the other person perceives. People often don't feel you are with them if they do not feel known. This mother and daughter had a tough road; they were in a bind, if you don't really reach me, you don't know me and if you don't know me, who is it you are loving?

WITHNESS comes about when there is a match; it fits, it's right.. People commonly crave it especially from romantic relationships, often mainly from romantic relationships and undermine many valuable with-ness moments as they move through their day.

With-ness can also come from things and environments. You may experience with-ness in nature; as all feels right with the world when there is a pattern of light on a wall or an exquisite view of the sky or the ocean.

You cannot force 'withness' but you can learn to set your radar to know and receive it. You can cultivate and practice tuning in and being specific with one another but, a relationship with natural matching places clicks better. Of course, no two brains are in sync and there is no such thing as one hundred percent with-ness in human relating.. In life it is like panning for gold and experiencing the pleasure a shiny nugget brings.

With-ness is a human need for specific, fine tuned connection if you know what I mean; are you with me?