

Appreciating the Assets of a Love Economy

by Mary Fogarty

Since working with the Conscious Aging Network of New Mexico's Planning Committee to ***Explore the Dimensions of Community*** for a PILOT workshop, my idea of community has expanded.

Now as a 65-year-old caregiver who is sharing responsibilities with a 69-year-old grandmother, we have integrated into our lives a 91-year-old great-grandmother, a 7-month-old infant named Isaiah, and several animals. This expanded community has offered a unique opportunity to observe how profoundly interconnected we all are and to appreciate the assets that come with a Love Economy.

Dr. David Korten author of ***The Great Turning*** tells us, "Relationships are the foundation of everything." In my personal experience with Isaiah, I find we start writing our life stories from the moment we are born. Early relationships set the stage for stories children will one day tell. The attachment formed between baby and primary caregiver determines what Northwestern University psychologist Dan McAdams, tells us is the beginning of the construction of personal identity at its core. "We are all tellers of tales, and we seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives, starting with early childhood and into late adulthood. We manufacture our dramatic personal myths by selectively mining some experiences and neglecting or forgetting others."

From past readings and five years of foster-childcare, I learned that the attachment formed between baby and primary caregiver determines our identity and is the beginning of what I call the 'Autobiographical Self'. That self can range from hopeless pessimism to boundless optimism. Isaiah, I believe, with a secure attachment will grow to orchestrate his life like a musical lyric with tones and symbols that will become his future narratives. He will extract these narratives from religious icons, fairy tales told at bedtime, model parents, kin and friends, as well as, intimidations by the neighborhood streets where he lives.

From the 91 year-old, I learn that as our lives draw-to-a-close, we take stock of our nearly finished tale. Our point-of-view becomes that of a creator looking back on the fruits of his or her creation and accepting what has transpired or rejecting the creation and experiencing frustration and despair. In despair, the identity is not worth accepting. There is a hole in our soul and it is perceived as too late to create a new identity. To find integrity and wholeness in life, we must look back upon our personal

myth and determine that, in spite of our shortcomings and limitations, life is good and carries some purpose and meaning.

Therefore, the ‘Autobiographical Self’ forms in the context of our social constructs and the communities into which we were born. The environments in which a child lives are crucial to providing growth, adjustment and a source of self-awareness and identity.

The strength of the human spirit, once ignited by positive forces and accompanied by a ‘critical self’ [that is someone who willingly criticizes, without excess, their own beliefs, thoughts, actions, and behaviors as a necessary way to learn, grow and have a sense of fulfillment] is taking healthy action and responsibility for the realities they create.

A healthy ‘critical self’ allows us at all stages of transformation to change and to overcome the ‘ego self’ with all of its subconscious deficits. Ego is what is false in us. Ego strengthens the sense of separateness upon which its identity depends and makes all suffering about “the other” refusing to accept responsibility for the realities manifested. Fed by the mind, ego invites: conflict, fragmentation, polarization, separation, and forms of addiction used to fill the holes in our souls and to cling to a false version of self. Developing a ‘critical self’ and overcoming the ego is the hardest challenge any of us have to confront.

However, once we choose to scrutinize our own conduct instead of judging or lambasting ‘*the other*’ we puncture through the ‘ego self’ that has a need to be right and to win at all cost. When we go beyond mind-made dualities and addictions that feed our spiritual voids, Eckhard Tolle tells us, “. . . we become like a deep lake where the outer situation of life is what happens on the surface: sometime calm, sometimes windy and rough, depending on the cycles and seasons. Deep down, however, the lake is undisturbed and whole as we become more in touch with our own depth and stillness.”

A strong self-image comes from a healthy ‘self-critic’ and the stories we tell ourselves. By changing our stories, we change our realities and expand our communities from immediate kin and family to a broader worldview. This is what Isaiah is doing as he reaches out to experience the world. In my own 65-year-old experience, when we encompass a larger composition in which we play a part, we start to understand our interdependence and interconnectedness. We, also, experience a greater tolerance; more compassion; and a willingness to go beyond the self-serving ego and become inclusive and more giving.

Psychologists tell us that healthy relationships and a healthy ‘critical self’ are the keys to achieving mature human consciousness. Life exists only in community and

as DavidKorten says, “Relationships are the foundation of everything.” True security and meaning are found in vibrant interlinked communities that encourage and support every person in realizing their fullest human potential.

New experiences through communities and relationships suggest that our world mirrors our beliefs. So making wise choices and being responsible for what those choices manifest, we can learn to appreciate the assets of a Love Economy. Or we can allow our ‘ego self’, with all of its subconscious deficits, to create fear and separation and make all suffering about ‘the other’ so we can be right and win at all cost—

Consumed by our consuming
and knowing nothing about when enough is enough
or what it means to live upon a little,
an avaricious man is forever in want
and will always be a slave to the hole in his soul.

~Mary Fogarty~