Nothing Exists Outside of Relationship

By Thomas Capshew

Nothing exists outside of relationship. Nothing can even be described without defining the boundary between what it is and what it is not.

Each of us lives in a context that not only defines us but also supports us. You, the reader, and I, the writer, along with the publisher of this magazine, are in relationship with each other by our choices: my choice to write and submit this article, the publisher’s choice to select and publish this article, and by your choice to focus on the words on this page.

The disharmony of this world, wherever one focuses, exists because of disharmony in relationship. Once relationship is recognized, energized, and honored, then disharmony dissipates and balance is restored. Disharmony in relationship can occur when our beliefs do not accurately reflect the basic structure of the world. In the United States, we are awakening to the recognition that we have a core belief that is based on an illusion. That core belief can be found in our collective myths, expressed as “rugged individualism,” “the self-made man,” or “pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps.” These axioms are deeply embedded in our culture, and have served the purpose of driving us to some stunning achievements, and the core belief is simply false.

Take any seemingly “individual” achievement as an example, from world records by an athlete in the Olympics, to Neil Armstrong walking on the moon, to Barak Obama being elected as the first Black President of the United States, and we know that behind each one, there are thousands upon thousands of people who lent their support, energy and expertise to making the seemingly individual achievement happen. Take a moment to examine your life and identify some of the people who supported and stood behind or alongside you as you reached your greatest achievements. Look also at the persons who at one time stood ahead of you, reaching back to share their wisdom and energy before you then surpassed them, like members of a relay team passing the baton. No achievement exists outside of relationship, and gratitude is a natural byproduct of attending to the ways relationships enrich our lives.

Every business that has ever launched, from the “Mom and Pop” shop to Apple or Microsoft, started in relationship and actually thrives because of attention to, and meeting the needs of, the humans involved in the exchange of services or products. Any entrepreneur will acknowledge that success is directly proportional to how clearly one sees the relationship between a human need and what is brought to market. The closer the match, the greater the success. This match between product and need can be called reciprocity, and over time, each informs the other. Advances in technology are made by continually modifying the product to meet a human need.
Relationships between humans are the same. Deep, abiding, nurturing relationships develop out of reciprocity – recognizing, energizing and honoring the connection between two people. Think for a moment about the relationships in your life. Even if the relationship is not active in a face-to-face, day-to-day way, it continues to be active. Once the connection is established, it is eternal. New experiences may not be happening, but the memory and energy of the experience lives on and informs our life. For example, some of my best work with my relationship with my parents has happened since they died. Since they are no longer in a body, it serves no purpose to cook them dinner, but my relationship with them informs my cooking of dinner for my children, both by the physical ingredients I put in the meal through recipes my Mom used, and by the energetic ingredients I put in the meal through the love and nurturing passed on in the way I parent. Even though my Dad was a good provider, he struggled with being emotionally present. While I cannot change his choices, I can use his choices to inform my choices of fathering by being attentive to the ways that I am emotionally available to my children. I cannot change the way my Dad ran his leg of the race of fathering, but now that the fathering baton is in my hand, I choose to run my leg of the race of fathering in a way that extends his successes.

Life lived deep and wide open only happens when we recognize relationship as the fundamental building block of the universe. We are no longer a point of singularity, we are expanded into an infinite variety of parts of a whole, only existing in an exchange of energy between other parts of the whole. Once we recognize that nothing exists outside of relationship, we remember that reciprocity is a fundamental dynamic of relationship, once either receiving or giving stops, we die. Just like breathing, we can neither always inhale nor always exhale, we must do both to remain alive. So, too, in relationship to our world, we must always receive and always give to remain alive. The support we receive to reach the achievements of our lives are inhalations of relationship. The ways we love and support others are our exhalations of relationship. How balanced is the breath of relationship in our life? As we recognize, energize and honor the breath of relationship in our lives, we stand in awe of the beauty of life.

Bio:

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