

talk, the quietude of the garden on a summer's day, the harmonious and gentle sounds of bees buzzing, birds chirping, and little plip-plops of frogs jumping into the pond — this domain is alien to compulsive talkers. They have no notion of silence, quietude, tranquility, inner spaciousness.

As a teenager, Sonia lived with her family — mother, father, brother, sister, and all of their friends who sat in the kitchen and talked meaninglessly for hours on end. Finally, one day, Sonia had to cover her ears and run out of the room, stifling her screams. When I visit my parents, they have to talk on and on, too. Drives me crazy. I always have to excuse myself, take a walk outside, regroup before coming back for more. My heart goes out to you.

When in the company of people who chatter on, saying nothing over and over again, I disappear inside. I open myself up completely and become like transparent spirit, or pure air. I listen to the chatter without focusing on details. It's a way of being aware of all of the linguistic noise going on at once, as if listening to music. In fact, there is a term for "environmental music." It's called aleatory music.

Interesting, yes?

When listening this way — listening to the "music" in the room, as if I don't even exist — it's as if the sounds just pass on through my bodymind, as if I am air. No resistance, no rejection of specific words or tones, just absolutely open, as if standing by the seaside, letting cool, fresh, ocean wind blow right through me, cleansing my spirit, soothing my soul. Without resisting the surrounding noise, I can bear up for quite awhile, with periodic breaks to leave the room, sit in the bathroom for a while, take a walk around the block, or just escape to the car for a nap.

Then, of course, I might suggest that there is always room for a couple of stiff shots of vodka sneaked from the kitchen cupboard when nobody is looking. I don't recommend it, because it lowers inhibitions and makes one vulnerable to an

explosion of rage. But if one can keep one's mouth shut, a little mellow-mellow might not hurt. One can more or less fall asleep with eyes wide open, comfortably numb as Pink Floyd put it, smiling and nodding without hearing a word they're saying.

T.S. Eliot once wrote —

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. . . .
Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion

Alas, my lovely, these are the folks you are having to deal with. Fade into listening, or into dreams. Remember the musics you know and love. Remember your gentle plant and animal friends in the garden. Remember me. I am with you, and looking forward to your return.

Soon, soon, it will be over, like a passing (and very noisy) dream,

Hang in and hang on,

All will be well.

JK Revolving Around the Sun-Center: Phases In Our Lives

So strange how relationships of all kinds come into our lives, stay for a little while, or a long while, then disappear into the sky. New relationships appear, dance, sing, weep, and again the phase matures, completes itself, and a new cycle begins. It's as if we are sun-centers, around which revolve the various planets in our lives. As we change, planets disappear, and new ones appear. And we orbit their sun-centers too. As we all change, we leave and find new sun-centers. Sometimes it takes years. Sometimes only weeks. Sometimes just a night or two. (Once in a while, only an afternoon!)

Really glad you gave it a go with S. If the two of you had not made the effort, you would wonder about it for the rest of your lives. You gave it a go, tested the extent of the framework, discovered its limitations, and bade farewell on good terms. Passion, intensity, excitement, exploration, then done with it, rather than stringing together years of estrangement, boredom, hostility, whatever.

Of course it would have been delightful if everything had clicked perfectly into place and the two of you could live happily ever after, but, as we all know, that is a rarity. Better to have made the effort and seen it disappear, than to not have given it a try, or to find yourself locked into a miserable situation, far, far removed from "happily ever after."

Phases. It all seems to be about phases in our lives, doesn't it? Live with gusto, dear one. Every phase counts as a sparkling jewel in our life's mosaic.

SL The Need to be Needed

My heart goes out to you. The dilemma you face with your friend in Ireland is truly difficult. It looks to me as though she is taking advantage of you, not only with the recent scam she pulled, but because of your very nature.

You wish to help, to serve, to be a loving, loyal friend; you wish to honor the many good years you shared with her; you do not want to be harsh with her any more than you want to participate in lies or deceptions. Looks to me like she is exploiting those things to serve her own needs, even as she is taking advantage of *your* needs: especially your need to help a suffering friend and your deep-seated need to be needed. In a very real sense, you have been dependent upon each other. It's a two-way street.

I think you are absolutely right. She DOES want to interfere with your writing and painting and sculpting. She hates your creativity and your positive, upbeat, life-affirming attitude. It takes attention away from her, and forces her to confront the emptiness in her own life. You ARE another crutch for her to use. You and she have been partners in her Poor Me Club for some 25 years now, and while you may not have seen it earlier, and perhaps did not begin suspecting it until only a few years ago, the situation is now as clear as crystal, is it not?

You most definitely have been throwing bright energy into her black crater for years. You WISH you had more love and sympathy to send her way, while at the same time you know now, beyond any doubt, that it died when you visited her last September — and you remember the undeniably legitimate reasons why. And yet, she brands you as hostile and cruel when you assert yourself, and you worry you are being a Miss Goody Two Shoes when you call her on her manipulative tricks. She snags you with guilt — and you go for it!

Quite often we enter into relationships that are unhealthy, usually because they fit into a psychological mind-set implanted in our heads when we were very young. A parent, for example, may be violent, self-centered, cruel, even vicious in his or her demands and criticisms. If we deny our own needs for love, and serve that abusive parent like slaves, we receive little crumbs of approval. Since we're starved for even the slightest gesture of affection, we gratefully gather up those crumbs, even though we have been psychologically beaten down, demeaned, crushed and humiliated in payment for them. We are systematically taught that we are no good, and we are

unworthy of love, respect, or honor — unless we serve *their* needs and demands at the expense of *our* self-respect. That dynamic often transfers into our adult lives, and there we are: locked in a mutually dependent relationship, one suffering and making demands, the other trying desperately to help and serve and nourish precisely because of her own profound need to be needed.

At first, we're in the relationship because it fulfills the pattern the parents instilled. It feels good for a while. It feels right and true. Then we may begin to suspect that it's an unhealthy relationship, although we may not know quite why. Then, as you have, we begin to see why and how and in how many specific ways the demands and manipulations are manifested.

Pretty soon, the clarity becomes too much: we know why and how we're unhappy in this mutually dependent relationship, and how we're being manipulated through guilt and our own needs. Your Irish friend is not alone; you are contributing from your side too. And then comes the moment you experienced in September: you *see things clearly*. You fully recognize the destructive two-way nature of the relationship. And you are confronted with a painful choice: to stay in it, or give it up and leave it behind.

These things take time, S. You know everything you need to know about her and yourself. Feel compassion for her and for your emergent authentic being. Give yourself love and understanding as you make these difficult decisions. They don't fulfill themselves over night. Don't let yourself be manipulated through guilt, a sense of unworthiness, or through your own deep-seated need to be needed. You do not have to be a slave to a self-centered, neurotic tyrant in order to be a worthwhile person.

In fact, it seems clear to me that you have outgrown her, which you know; and you are emerging into a new stage in your life, in which love, creativity, emotional equilibrium and your own insightful wisdom lead the way forward. You can assert

yourself with strength and dignity, as an independent human being who is choosing her own freedom.

She may whine and rail and call you names, but you do NOT have to accept her judgments. Those are projections of her own mind, which remains as it always has been. You have every right to detach from the situation, assert yourself honestly, even harshly if necessary, and to spread your own wings in your new-found freedom and perceptual clarity. Do not feel guilty for wanting more happiness in your life.

There is hope. There is a better way. And you know which way it is! Thank you for letting me in on how things are moving along for you in this area. I have complete confidence in your good judgment and wish you the very best, L

SL

A Goddess In Exile

Do not fear any longer the things you are seeing in some of your close relationships. Just watch. Pay attention. Become more aware. Observe. See what happens and how it happens. Let conversations and events settle into your mind. Understand them. Keep on observing. Watch the way things unfold. Trust yourself. Take your time. Watch. Listen. Know. (That was the original title of my novel *Diamondfire*, by the way. *Watch* and see clearly. *Listen* to your inner voices. In that way, you will come to *know who you are* and what you can become.)

As Osho once said, “You are a goddess in exile. When you recognize this, you will take a quantum leap into your own reality. You will come home — to your Self!”

JK Love as Service. Service as Love. Be an Angel.

You may have something important to do, and this may be a good time to do it. You doubt yourself at the moment, but I think you have a great deal to offer, much more than you give yourself credit for.

While the situation with John is disappointing and emotionally difficult right now because he left you, the situation with the woman you nanny for is immediate and pressing. You are the perfect person for her and her children right now. And the circumstances you are in are perfect for everything that is needed for them, especially the woman, who in her illness needs the particular expertise you have, and the little boy who is experiencing severe anxiety over the possibly of losing his mother to cancer.

You can be an angel for them.

In turn, they offer a perfect focus for your love, compassion, understanding, and incredible strength. Even as you saved me from loneliness and anguish, and gave me warmth and love those forty-two years ago, so you can do the same in this heightened situation involving loss and perhaps death. No only that, but the more you pour your energy and attention into their lives, the easier it will be for you to transcend and perhaps even forget whatever disappointments you feel over John.

We're talking about service.

Some people are temperamentally perfect for a life of service to others, a life of nourishing and helping; a life of sharing compassion, hope and strength with those in need. In a sense, the intense need you feel for love and companionship in your own life can be transformed into a kind of radiant, outgoing love-energy that

assuages that same need in others. You have already given much of your life to others this way. And you know that no one is more lonely than a person facing cancer, multiple surgeries, possible painful dying, and imminent death. How fitting that your personal sorrows give such depth to your soul; give such healing energy to your compassion; give the power of vitalizing love to your every word and gesture.

These qualities are needed. You have them. You once sculpted exquisite papier-mâché angels. An angel is even more beautiful when she is human and alive, as you are, an angel sitting by a sick woman's bedside, holding her hand, smiling into her eyes, offering deep companionship, powerful unconditional love, and the abiding hope that she can survive and flourish. You can be an angel. You *are* an angel.

What a great service.

It requires deep love, courage, wisdom, compassion, and skill. Hardly anybody can do it. Mother Teresa did it. St. Francis of Assisi did it. You can too. You can bring all of the love, pain, loss, heartbreak and suffering that you have felt in your personal life, and channel it into service to your woman friend and her family. You can transmute every sorrow of yours into understanding and healing life-light that will bring hope and energy, not only to this woman and her children, but to yourself as well.

Already, for many years, you have done this for various people. Your life has been an intense life of loving service, of nourishing others in need. Sometimes it has been for the men you have met and liked and occasionally loved. Other times for anguished and desperate people on the Suicide Hotline. Other times for strangers who have needed a smile or a helping hand. Sometimes for the very woman and her children who need you and your special energies today, more than ever before.

By recognizing yourself in this way, by collecting your life's experiences and mobilizing them, by channeling your resultant insights, understandings, and

wisdom into an intensely focused beam of spiritually healing light, you will serve others, you will serve yourself and God as well.

In some ways, your path has been similar to that of others. You have experienced the joys and sorrows of orthodox relationships, as others have. Men have entered your life and danced with you a while, before departing. Perhaps this is simply an aspect of your calling. Some people have permanent partners; others follow a different way. You have also experienced the joys of having children, and the sorrows of watching them grow up and go out on their own. You have experienced the joys of many friendships along the way, and the sorrows of watching them pass into other lives and other domains.

In a sense, these so-called "normal" experiences have given you deep insight into the nature of life's transience, of love's highs and lows, of living in hope and disappointment — and quite possibly this insight — that everything passes — has been a preparation for an even deeper, more intensely committed purpose that few people have ever considered.

So-called "normal" experiences and the joys and sufferings they have engendered have lifted you to a significantly higher plane: selfless service to those who suffer.

It is a high calling, J.

It takes a special kind of courage, bravery and strength. You have these qualities in abundance. You have experience, you have depth, you have more strength, love and wisdom than you think you have. And this is a perfect time in your life to embrace this calling consciously and fully, without reservation.

Your lovely garden is an ideal sanctuary, the perfect place to enter deeply into prayer, reflection, and contemplation. As you tap into certain Higher Domains that you already know about, then light, love and energy will pour into you, vitalizing

your body, your mind, your transcendent spirit. In turn, you can use it to serve the woman and her children who need you now, perhaps more than ever before.

And wherever you go outside of that immediate context, your light will continue to shine. Those who need what you have will recognize and respond to it. Many already have. Many others will

After every sharing, rest. Enter your beautiful garden. Sit down, go deeply into yourself. Energy will renew itself. Internally in solitude and externally among others, this special kind of giving and receiving will vitalize your every moment. Your path may not be the same as that of conventional folks with their conventional satisfactions, but it is a high calling that serves profound needs and in some ways offers the greatest rewards any spiritually awakened person could ever hope for.

The next time you open your front door on your way to visit your woman friend and her children, leave all of your past behind, wake up fully to who you are right here and now, breathe deeply, and smile. Go to your woman — love, serve, help her heal.

Good things are coming for you, J.

All will be well,

Much love,

Lee

SL

Courage, Integrity, Living In Truth

You're absolutely right in everything you said to D. If a friend can't handle honesty, then he's not truly a friend.

Indeed, most people have great difficulty discussing their inner conflicts. They have a notion about "it's too personal," because they are split within themselves: a public self about which they can speak, and a private, secretive self about which they cannot speak, but which often motivates virtually their every word and deed. Honesty takes courage: to speak one's mind, and to listen to truths that make one feel uncomfortable.

You have that double-edged courage, and that, among your many other laudable attributes, sets you more than a notch or two above the general run. It's a quality that isolates one sometimes, but so is integrity, talent, beauty and intelligence. Best, by far, to speak your mind, let the chips fall where they may, and to definitely not allow anyone to casually and carelessly threaten or ruin your sense of safety, well-being, and self-respect.

Good for you!

There is a chance that D will consider what you said. He may see the wisdom in your words, and realize that he has an opportunity to be more of the kind of man he sincerely wishes to be.

Hardly anybody in this madhouse of a world can think about another and value the other's needs and wishes above their own. Nearly everybody is a raving narcissist to one degree or another. Whatever the circumstances, it's nearly always "me-me-me" first. It's about me, not the other. It's about one's own feelings, not the other's. The other is supposed to stifle their own needs and feelings and fears and desires and serve the me-needs first and foremost. It's a hellish situation, all too typical of

psycho-spiritually undeveloped people. And they constitute the majority (hence squabbles between individuals, and wars between nations).

Parents very often are the villains in this dynamic — the child is reduced to a slave; the parent is elevated to dictatorial heights. Empathy is thrown out the window, and children grow up frightened and angry, bristling with unmet needs for love, understanding, compassion and safety — as a result, they every often become rather like their parents, only now *they* are the dictators and their own children or lovers become the slaves. It's crazy stuff. Not easy to deal with.

But as you point out, you did just fine w/D this last Thursday. That's why I say you may have helped him understand the nature and value of empathy. Contrary to popular notions, love or lovingness is not natural. It has to be learned. We learn how to care and how to love — or we don't. But who is to teach us if the parents unwittingly failed? Relationships teach us. We learn as we go — or we don't learn.

I learned by losing somebody I deeply loved. When she threw me away, only then did I realize how much I loved and needed her. Only then did I comprehend the treasure I had lost. Through that profound loss, I began to explore, develop and learn the complexities of love and lovingness. As a result, Sonia and I have been together happily for some 34 years.

Perhaps D will not have to lose your friendship. Perhaps he will see and understand the importance of what you told him. Your words may be sinking in even as we speak. There is a possibility that the realization will come to him like a flash of light. I recall that you two had a bit of a conflict a while back, and he returned to you a better person. Maybe this time too? We'll see. Let me know how things evolve, won't you?

Meanwhile, your willingness to be honest with him speaks well of your courage and integrity. Living in truth is infinitely better than living a lie.

