

“CLARK”

“Clark” swaggered into my office. He was thirty-something, tall, broad shouldered, and muscular in that way that says, “Yeah, I work out. A lot.” Clean cut, good looking, and confident, he was a guy’s guy; I could picture him chopping wood. His face looked open, like it had no secrets. We said our Hello’s, smiled, and shook hands, but I was on alert. It wasn’t fear, just the visceral wake-up I get when instinct tells me, “No matter how convincing individual’s persona looks, there’s something different underneath.”

As our session started Clark told me he was there because his girlfriend, a client of mine, thought it might help their relationship. She thought he had problems with emotional intimacy. He went on to say that he agreed. He didn’t know why, but whenever he started to get close to women he would pull away. He really loved this girlfriend and felt drawn to build a future with her, but whenever he thought about it he would get confused and then say or do things that created distance between them. He wondered if he ever was going to be capable of settling down and enjoying a committed relationship. As I asked questions it became clear that he didn’t think he had any fears; his only problem was that this mystifying dynamic kept occurring.

Our conversation turned to his work as a police officer. He talked easily about the challenges of the job, commitment he had to serving his community, camaraderie with his fellow officers, importance of keeping emotions in check, and necessity of reacting to situations according to procedure. As he described some of the dangerous situations he took in stride daily, I said, “That sounds pretty scary.” “No,” he replied, “I don’t really feel scared.”

As we talked about how violent and irrational some of the people he'd arrested had been, his easy going manner disappeared, and his tone quickly became reproachful. These were terrible, awful people who deserved whatever punishment they got, was his opinion. "All of them?" I wondered. Yes, pretty much, he was certain.

He began a story he was sure would convince me. In the middle of the night, seven or eight years previously, he and his partner had been trying to arrest an out-of-control, violent man who had been threatening people on the street. Soon into the story, Clark couldn't find words bad enough (that he was willing to say in front of me) to describe the man. "This guy was the worst of the worst, scum of the earth. People like him are hardly human," was his sentiment.

"We were trying to cuff him, but he was too violent to catch and hold." (This was before Tazers.) "He was high on something. He felt no pain, and there was no reasoning with him." Clark paused to inhale. "That son-of-bitch had a knife. My partner turned away for a split second, *just a split second*, to open the car door, and that #\*+&\*!! charged him."

Words poured out of him now. "My partner didn't have a chance, it all happened too fast. The guy was going to stab him, he was going to *kill* him. I had no choice, I HAD to save my partner! I pulled the trigger. I shot that slimy, no-good #\*+&\*!! . He went down instantly."

Clark's face crumbled. He stared at me dumbfounded as he continued, "I'd shot him in the stomach, and his blood was all over the sidewalk. We called for an ambulance and tried to stop the bleeding while we waited, but"—sobs were starting to break free—"it was no use, that bastard died within minutes."

Clark's face was in his hands now as the weight he'd been carrying pressed on him. Sobs shook his shoulders, as though shaking loose the grief and torment he'd kept strapped down all those years so it wouldn't reach his heart and make him feel. Now the flood of feelings came, and Clark didn't resist.

"I hated that guy, but I still didn't want to kill him." His face lifted, eyes wide. "Underneath, he was still a person. I killed a person. A real person! I wanted to be someone who helped, not killed." Now grief gushed out in a release of tears. There was no hiding and no holding back. No keeping the feelings at bay. No more turning away from them. No more strapping anything down to keep it still and silent. Clark's eyes stayed with mine as tears and words flowed. "I had to protect my partner, but I didn't want to kill anybody. I never wanted to kill anybody."

As Clark talked on, his body softened, his shoulders dropped, bravado was gone. "Is it possible you're feeling grief?" I asked. He nodded, but seemed mystified, not quite sure how he'd gotten there. "Is it possible that after you shot that man, and he died, what disturbed you most was not how horrible a person he'd been, but how horrible your grief felt?" I asked.

"Yes." Clark's words emerged slowly, his voice low. "I had no idea, no idea. Grief for that man, for the life he lost." He looked at me with surprise, "And grief for myself. I lost something that night. My heart has been broken ever since."

I asked Clark to close his eyes and let his awareness settle gently in his heart. When he nodded he was there, I continued guiding him deeper, into his true self, into that aspect of his being that is so all-loving and all-nurturing that it is not afraid of broken hearts, or shootings, or grief that feels too big. Clark breathed into his true self and

sighed. Big sighs, sighs that had waited at the outskirts of anger and judgment seven or eight years to be signaled that it was safe now, that they were welcome. Sighs and tears mingled. Then peace settled in.

When Clark opened his eyes, he looked at me with calm. The current of emotion had carried him Home, to true self, to his ever present source of comfort and compassion, to gentle shores. With new self-compassion, Clark talked more about the incident, how it had affected him, and how little encouragement he had gotten at his job to show his pain. Noticeably absent from the rest of our conversation was any more judgment or disgust about the difficult and dangerous “bad guys” so plentiful in his work. It wasn’t necessary anymore.

No wonder Clark had had trouble being emotionally intimate with his girlfriend; he had put up a barrier to emotional intimacy with himself. To keep his grief at bay he had had to keep himself out of his own heart. His source of deepest love, vulnerability, and connection to people, to *all* people, girlfriends and bad guys and everyone in between, had been off limits. He had kept to the outer periphery of that barrier, where, like at the edge of a solar system, conditions that nourish humans are sparsest.

We often forget that our primary, human relationship is not with our romantic partner; it’s with our self. The more intimately present we are with ourselves, the more intimate we can be with others. Connecting with true self is the deepest intimacy we can have. Emotion, even anger and judgment, can take us there. Expressing our emotions in a safe environment—whether telling our story to a caring, compassionate person, writing in our journal, or simply speaking out loud kindly to ourselves when we’re alone—can carry us to true self if that is where we want to go. True self is big enough to cradle all our

feelings, all our stories, all our fears that life might be too much for us. True self is the source of the love and compassion we have in our hearts, and the safety we need to live there.

Martia Nelson, life coach and author of "Coming Home: The Return to True Self," helps you reclaim your true self and a life that makes your soul sing. Get your FREE mp3 at [www.MartiaNelson.com](http://www.MartiaNelson.com). Copyright (c) 2008 Martia Nelson, all rights reserved.

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