



## Internal Intimacy

By: Elizabeth Barr

I wonder about different kinds of intimacy. If intimacy is defined only as something that is shared or expressed physically, then I'm out of luck for sure! I wonder, also, if intimacy must be understood as always including someone else, even if not physical? I don't think so, after all. If intimacy lives in the heart or is a mental construct, then it's freely available to everyone, even those who are alone. And getting to know yourself well is its own type of intimacy. I think that when hearts or minds are connected, whether to ourselves or to others, this is what we name as Intimacy.

### Precious and Protected

I picked a great pile of lettuce from the backyard garden and using bits of leftover corn on the cob, a droopy looking carrot from the back of the fridge, and a boiled egg, I put together a quick salad. When I served it, my friend seemed disappointed, and said, "What? No pickled beets? But I love pickled beets in a salad!" Amazingly, I had no idea about that, despite us having known each other well for most of 15 years, so I was excited to find out this little detail that can so easily help someone else have a great day in the future. I'll be sure to include that in the next salad I make! More interestingly, I noticed that my immediate instinct was to text everyone (or at least my Mom) and let

them know I had discovered this "secret" about someone we all care for. A little voice in my heart held me back, though. Knowing something special about someone special feels intimate, even if it as casual as salad.

### Shared Challenges

I certainly don't think of myself as official Elder quite yet, but I am now older enough than most people around me that I have some distance to see situations through a different lens than I did when I myself was that age. I wonder if the 80- and 90-year-olds look at those of us in our 40s and 50s and think, "oh, aren't they so sweet, how they're trying to get through... (whatever)..." or, "I remember so well when I was dealing with...that..." I find that I feel more connected, and more deeply, with people I've known only a minute or two, if they are facing situations that are similar to my own past, than I do with some people I've known many years. Likewise, I find myself feeling closer to Mom as time goes on, now that I've been parenting long enough to better understand the stories she shares that I've never heard before of challenges that I was oblivious to at the time, even while living in the same house! Physical proximity, closeness in age, or even a personal meeting all seem entirely unnecessary to create a sense of intimacy in most of my relationships during this time in my life.

### Dancing with My Dark

Last week it came again, the spiraling downward feeling that I've come to recognize and know well, if not exactly make friends with quite yet. This Dark and I have traveled together throughout my life, and the more often I approach it with interest and curiosity and awareness, the less often it comes around, and the shorter the visits. For years and years, I tried avoidance, denial, alcohol, online games, and excessive busy-ness, and none of those have worked to make depression, anxiety, or mood swings any easier to manage. The only way I've found that works for me is to boldly greet that other aspect of myself and go together, and through, to the other side. Sometimes now, I can make it through a short bad spell on my own and other people around me seem to not even be aware—a huge change from the past (and a good one, I think). Through getting to know myself better, I am more able to get to know others, because developing the skill of acceptance (of myself) leads to an improved ability to accept others as they are, too.

### Intimacy as Awareness

Perhaps intimacy is simply a special word for awareness and being present, either with ourselves or with others? That mindfulness can be expressed during physical closeness, of course, but needn't always be, as there are many other ways to feel connected. ☺

*lived in a rural commune for four years and actually enjoyed taking notes at meetings. She now writes for various places online;*

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