

Introduction from the Guest Editor Robin Shohet



'You made me wait so long that I got used to missing you. You came back after a long time. I now love longing for you more than I love you.'

(Aziz Nesin).

The topic of this special edition is longing. I have not found much in the psychological literature on this subject and yet when I have interviewed people they have all said how simply talking about it has released a huge amount of energy and been healing. Many of them have gone back to their partners and shared what might have been a taboo topic – it's as if owning up to this longing was a form of disloyalty, and therefore almost a shameful secret.

My life seems to have consisted of one long longing. The objects of the longing have taken different forms, but whether they be gurus, longing for union with God or women, the longing takes me out of the present moment. I have just finished a 28 day retreat. Towards the end I kept saying, 'I don't want to be here.' The facilitators said, 'You are lying. You could just go if you wanted to.' I knew it was true, yet I still felt I didn't want to be there. And then it clicked. This is my lifelong statement, buried when things are going my way, but ready to reappear at any moment. I described it as a tinnitus of the mind – could be overshadowed, but was always there in the background. And that noise in my head keeps me out of the present and in longing.

Longing can look very spiritual – the longing to be united with God is very seductive. But it can be a huge escape. The Course in Miracles says the ego's plan of salvation is seek and do not find. This way we can keep going from one object of longing to another. Beyond that, however, I wonder if there is a longing to return home – home to our true natures of oneness which according to The Course in Miracles we only imagined we left, and which is always there waiting patiently like the sun behind the clouds of our monkey minds.

How we distinguish between avoidant longing and a longing that moves us I do not know. Certainly this longing took me to India for the Truth in my twenties and has led me to many experiences for

which I am very grateful. But it has also led to a restlessness. Kahlil Gibran captures this well:

And a love sick man said, 'Master speak to us of longing' and he replied:

'Out of your longings you have created much of what is beautiful in your life. Some of your happiest moments have been when you have been able to fulfil your longings and rest. These moments have filled you with joy. Yet buried in those moments have been the worms of fear and discontent. For your longing is a sign that you are not at home with yourself and you know the joy you feel will not last.' (The Prophet)

In this edition I have collected five articles. The first from Dina Glouberman expresses some of our dilemmas around longing with a beautiful honesty. We know there is nothing out there that can do it for us, yet like an addict we keep hoping that the next fix (man/woman/guru/workshop) will do it.

Gretel McEwen continues with the same honesty, and begins to unpack some of her dysfunctional attraction to longing, and in our interview was very open to exploring how longing had affected her life.

In the third article Alun Reynolds writes of his experiences of Family Constellation work and the connection between longing and unfinished family business whether it be unresolved grief or a family secret. I have experienced the power of this work myself and it leads to one of the tenets of Constellation work - accepting life at whatever cost, which I see as another way of saying be here now.

I asked Nigel Hamilton to contribute a piece because I know the Sufi tradition features longing quite prominently. He describes how longing can take different forms – in a materialistic person it is for objects, in an idealist it could be for peace. But ultimately the soul is wanting to go back home, a reflection of God longing to know Itself. The idea of God wanting to know Itself reminds me again of Kahlil Gibran's famous lines on children:

'Your children are not your children. They are life's longing for itself.' (The Prophet)

Finally Unmani says You are what you long for. You are love. That's it.

So that is it. I would be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to dialogue further.

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