

LESSONS LEARNED FROM A VISIT WITH MY SON

By Marlene Neufeld

This summer my 32-year old son, who lives in Asia, came for a visit for two months. He hadn't been home for 4 ½ years. To further complicate our relationship, he brought his Japanese wife to North America for the first time. In the past, my son and I have had a tumultuous relationship, full of drama and conflict. However, I have been practicing conscious living and loving for 4 years and have been coaching others in conscious loving relationships for 3 years. I have transformed my relationship with my husband to the point where we have few conflicts, and experience spaciousness and fun with each other. Here was another opportunity to put into practice everything I had learned. I would like to share with you what was particularly helpful.

1. To let go of things I couldn't control:

Two thousand years ago Epictetus said that the key to happiness was to learn the difference between what you can control and what you can't control. I learned that the only things I could control were my own choices and actions. I could not control my feelings or my son's feelings. I could certainly not control my son's choices and actions...and, invariably, when I tried, the result was not what I wanted.

2. To stay out of what wasn't my business

This is another way of saying the above. It became clear that, not only could I not control it, my son's relationship with his wife wasn't my business. How my son lives his life isn't my business. How my son dresses and looks isn't my business. When I tried to make it my business, even if my intentions were good, we would have conflict.

3. To be more playful and not take myself so seriously

At first, when I was striving to let go of things I couldn't control and stay out of what wasn't my business, I would be very hard on myself when I made a mistake. I learned to forgive myself for falling back into old patterns. Beating myself up for trying to control him or getting involved in his business wasn't helpful. When I was hard on myself for making a mistake, I didn't actually learn anything. When I could acknowledge what I had done playfully, then we were both able to move on more easily.

4. To look underneath my attempts to control him

I began to realize that whenever I was trying to control him, I was usually feeling afraid about something. Often, I was afraid that he wouldn't be successful in what he was attempting. My basic scarcity issues came up and often got in the way of connection. This could show up with as small an issue as being afraid that there wasn't enough food which could lead me to trying to control what he was having for lunch.

5. To make clear requests

Although I couldn't control him, I found that if I made clear requests he was often responsive. If I said, "I would like to save those peaches for supper, and I request that you not eat them now," he would respond more positively than if I said "Don't eat the peaches" or even, "those peaches aren't for right now".

6. To create opportunities for space from each other

Since we don't see each other frequently, my tendency at first, was to think I had to spend all my time with him. When I learned to say, "I want some space" or "my husband and I would like to have some private time this evening" we got along better.

7. To focus on appreciation

This has been one of the most valuable lessons I have learned. I realized that no matter how tired I was, I could generate something to appreciate about him or the situation. When I focused on what I appreciated, rather than what wasn't working, I felt better about myself and him.

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