

Adjacent opportunities (18.3-4)

The sidewalk hug

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There was a card table set up on the sidewalk outside my polling place at which two women stood. Their sign read “Free Hugs.” They were offering these to anyone who needed one during this highly stressful election season. It was a very generous and loving offer: simple, human and touching.

On the bottom of their sign, it asked a question: Are you planning to move to Canada after the election? When I passed back by their table after voting, they asked if I’d like a hug. It was an honest and generous offer. I told them “no,” that I was all right, but I added, I thought we might be moving to Canada. They then told me they were both real estate brokers and that if I were thinking of selling my house, they would be interested in listing it. I was handed their flyer. And I started to laugh.

It was a brilliant, entrepreneurial play. They offered their hug genuinely, without strings, but recognizing an opportunity, these two enterprising women had figured out how to get a loving step-up on their competition. There was nothing untoward or usury about their approach. There was no question the hug offer was sincere. But it was also a rather unique, all American approach which, with a great dash of humor and chutzpah, exemplified the enduring spirit of the country, no matter the result of the election.

This, then, is about the autonomic, emergent property of love. It never felt like these two women, Rita Kanberian and Melissa Quade, were trying to manipulate the situation. It was rather that by extending the human closeness of an embrace, first, they were demonstrating what could emerge from love and trust that would benefit both parties. It was an amazing display of ingenuity and warmth which woke me up with laughter, and at least briefly, reduced the anxiety of the election ordeal.

We are interdependent beings, connected through a web of interactions that is definitely non-linear. First and foremost, we are connected, and from within that mass confusion of intertwining we reach out and show our humanity.

The day after one of the most painful and distressing days of my life, it was the action of Rita and Melissa that has helped get me through the day. What emerged was humanity. What won the day was that most basic of interactions, an embrace that offered direct, unembarrassed, unencumbered human connection. It was brilliant and authentic marketing for how, as businesswomen, I would be treated as their client.

The living saint, Ammaji, travels the world, and does nothing more for the 1000s who come to see her than give them a hug. People line up for hours to feel her embrace. What emerges for these followers is love, acceptance, worthiness, and an intimate connection to those with whom they share this world. This, I believe, is how we survive the mark of fear brought on by our voting myopic behaviors.

To counterbalance the overwhelming, fear-based, seemingly mindless choices made by this country, we cannot simply offer more fear or mindlessness. Anger and aggression are not offset by more anger and aggression. Interaction and emergence is funny that way. If and when our hearts are broken, don’t close your heart, open it more. That was what Rita and Melissa offered, and it succeeded in ways they probably never imagined.

I don’t know if they got one new client yesterday from their offering, but I bet down the line they will be remembered for their act of kindness and what it represented about how they ran their business. The emergent phenomena of love means that no matter what shows up, including hate and vitriol, anger and aggression, it can be pacified and/or destroyed with authentic love that is not conditioned by the actions of others.

Does that mean that bad people won’t do bad things? They will. That if those bad people do those bad things we shouldn’t do our best to stop them? We should. But there are skillful means that allow us to also live within our human circumstance in such a way that those who have felt excluded, unworthy, unaccepted and unloved can choose to leave their own personal Hells and re-enter the realm of their fellow beings. It might begin with a gesture, a hug, even just the offer of a hug. It’s certainly hard to hate the person you are hugging no matter the depth of your disagreement, anger, or feeling of exclusion.

Rita and Melissa were not offering a new solution, but rather a wholly connected, visceral recognition of the world as it was showing up – people are anxious and uncertain. What can we do? We can give them the closeness of a human hug.

If I were selling a house, they would be my listing agent. It's what I look for in the kinds of businesses I support. How the proprietors treat their customers. How they connect with the world I am meeting. If their offer had smacked of a lack of authenticity, it would have been immediately apparent. But it was because it was so real and honest and filled with love and comfort that more of us can learn by their example. The most powerful connection we have is love and the emergent phenomena that arises is more love.

If your heart was broken by the recent voting, find a way to open your heart more rather than shutting it down in anger, disappointment or resentment. What automatically emerges from that action of opening to the world is less bitterness and more love. And from that foundation, we can build a new society that will emerge not out of the ashes, but out of our willingness to hold each other close and remain open to the opportunities and possibilities that surround us, and not be broken asunder by what separates us.

If you'd like to thank Rita and Melissa for their simple act of love, comment on this piece and I will gladly connect you.