The Art of Receiving

The Practice of Meeting Ourselves, One Another, and Life as It Is

Every person we meet is living a life we cannot see from the inside.

We encounter a face, a voice, a few words, a moment of behavior. Behind those things is someone who has experienced an entire world. Someone who has loved, wanted, wondered, learned, been hurt, laughed, hoped, lost, adapted, and found reasons to protect parts of themselves.

And then we meet.

For a moment, two lives touch.

What happens in that meeting matters.

We each bring our histories, expectations, experiences, fears, assumptions, and capacity to care. We bring what we think we know about people and about the world. Sometimes we bring what we already believe about the person standing in front of us.

Receiving begins by making room for something more.

To receive another person is to create enough space for them to arrive before we decide who they are.

There you are.

Before I explain you.

Before I categorize you.

Before I determine what you need.

Before I decide what your behavior means.

Before I decide whether you are like me.

There you are.

And there is someone here worth discovering.

Before we decide

Human beings are remarkably quick at interpretation.

We recognize patterns. We remember previous experiences. We notice clothing, language, behavior, age, roles, diagnoses, politics, occupations, histories.

Sometimes our assumptions arrive before the other person has finished speaking.

And sometimes we know the person extremely well.

They may be our partner.

Our child.

Our parent.

A lifelong friend.

Someone we have worked beside for years.

Familiarity can create another kind of certainty.

I know how he is.

She always does this.

I already know what he's going to say.

Receiving asks us to notice when our knowledge has become a conclusion.

Can I hold what I know lightly enough that you are still allowed to surprise me?

Can I encounter the person who is here today rather than only the person I remember from yesterday?

The knowledge we bring can be useful. But knowing a subject does not mean knowing what it is like for this person to experience it.

I can understand grief without understanding your grief.

I can know about trauma without knowing what happened inside you.

I can understand autism without knowing what it feels like to be you.

I can have loved before and still have something to learn about how you love.

What is true for me may not be true for you.

You remain the expert on the experience of being you.

Receiving asks me to become interested in that experience.

A posture

Receiving begins inside the receiver.

It is not merely something we say or do.

It is a posture.

I cannot remove every assumption, bias, fear, judgment, or expectation from myself. My mind will interpret. It will compare. It will form conclusions.

Receiving asks me to notice that process.

I can see the judgment without immediately treating it as truth.

I can notice the explanation appearing in my mind and leave room for another possibility.

I can move toward curiosity rather than certainty.

Toward openness rather than defensiveness.

Toward acceptance rather than immediate correction.

Toward gratitude rather than indifference.

Toward love rather than fear.

Receiving is not pretending that I know nothing.

It is remembering that **I do not know everything**.

There is always more to another human being than I can see.

And because people are still living, experiencing, and becoming, my understanding of them can never be completely finished.

Receiving is therefore not something we accomplish.

It is something we return to.

Again and again.

The faith that there is something to understand

Receiving is meeting another person with the faith that they make sense—even when we do not yet understand how.

Someone may respond in a way that surprises us.

They may withdraw when we expected engagement.

They may become angry when we expected gratitude.

They may reject something that seems perfectly reasonable to us.

We can decide very quickly what this means.

Difficult.

Lazy.

Selfish.

Unmotivated.

Too sensitive.

Attention seeking.

Unreasonable.

Or we can remain curious.

What is happening here?

What does this feel like from where you are standing?

What matters to you?

What am I missing?

What have you experienced that I cannot see?

Receiving does not require us to manufacture an explanation.

Sometimes we will understand.

Sometimes we will not.

Sometimes the person themselves does not yet understand.

And sometimes what they are experiencing is private.

Their dignity does not depend on how much they explain to us.

A person does not owe us their trauma before we offer compassion.

They do not require a diagnosis before their experience becomes real.

We can believe there is something to understand without demanding access to everything.

Receiving the person does not mean receiving every behavior

Receiving is not permissiveness.

It does not mean that everything another person does is acceptable.

We can disagree.

We can establish boundaries.

We can stop harmful behavior.

We can expect responsibility.

We can hold people accountable.

Receiving a person does not require receiving every behavior.

There is an enormous difference between saying:

What you did is not okay.

and:

You are not okay.

Behavior gives us information.

It may require action.

It may require repair.

But behavior is not the entirety of a human being.

There is still someone there.

Open arms and gratitude

Receiving includes something more than tolerance.

It includes gladness.

I am glad you are here.

Your presence has changed this moment.

You may tell me something I have never considered.

You may challenge something I believe.

You may make me laugh.

You may show me a way of experiencing the world that I could never discover by remaining inside my own life.

Or perhaps we will simply share a few moments together.

But something exists because you came that would not have existed without you.

Had you not been here, I would have missed it.

I would have missed you.

You are important enough to be missed.

Receiving someone with open arms does not mean overwhelming them with affection.

Sometimes open arms look like space.

Sometimes silence.

Sometimes a question.

Sometimes attention.

Sometimes sitting beside someone without trying to fix anything.

The form changes.

The message underneath it does not.

There is room for you here.

What happens when someone is received?

Something can begin to change when a person believes that message.

When you realize I am not constantly evaluating you.

When you discover that you do not have to perform a particular version of yourself to remain welcome.

When disagreement does not automatically cost you belonging.

When your differences do not threaten your place with me.

When you do not have to justify every feeling before I recognize that it matters.

Your guard may begin to soften.

You may risk saying something true.

You may admit that you do not know.

You may reveal an interest you thought was strange.

You may try something and fail.

You may stop monitoring yourself so carefully.

You may simply breathe differently.

And little by little, you may spend less energy determining who you must be in order to remain welcome.

You may have more room to become yourself.

Receiving does not merely help us see the authentic person. It helps create the conditions in which the authentic person can emerge.

Safety.

Belonging.

Connection.

Autonomy.

Curiosity.

Acceptance.

Freedom.

None of these tells someone who they should become.

They make discovery possible.

Sometimes we do not know who we are until there is enough safety to stop being who we think we are supposed to be.

Thank you for telling me

When someone shares something with us, they are giving us access to a place we cannot reach on our own.

A memory.

A fear.

An idea.

A ridiculous story.

A hope.

A disappointment.

Something they noticed on the way home.

Something they have never said aloud.

Another human consciousness has opened a small window and said:

Here. This is what the world looks like from inside me.

Receiving means appreciating that offering.

Thank you for telling me.

And instead of immediately responding with our own story, our own interpretation, or our own advice, perhaps we remain for another moment.

Tell me more.

What was that like?

What did that mean to you?

What happened next?

Or sometimes simply:

I'm here.

Receiving ourselves

Eventually the same posture turns inward.

Can I receive myself?

Can I notice something inside myself without immediately turning against the person experiencing it?

Fear arrives.

There you are.

Anger.

Grief.

Jealousy.

Excitement.

Exhaustion.

Desire.

A dream I have been afraid to acknowledge.

A reaction I wish I had handled differently.

Here I am.

This is what I am feeling.

I can become curious about this too.

Receiving ourselves does not mean every thought is true.

It does not mean every feeling should determine our behavior.

It does not mean every impulse should become an action.

Our thoughts are experiences we have.

Our beliefs have histories.

Some were formed through our families.

Some through culture.

Some through relationships.

Some through painful experiences.

Some through what we learned we needed to do in order to belong.

Some of these beliefs may be useful.

Others may no longer be.

Receiving gives us enough space to notice them.

What is happening here?

Where did this come from?

Is this still true?

Does this still belong to me?

What do I actually want?

What might I choose now?

There is a self here worth discovering.

Perhaps beneath all of the expectations, roles, beliefs, thoughts, experiences, and stories we have accumulated is something even more fundamental.

The extraordinary fact that **we are here at all**.

Aware.

Alive.

Experiencing existence.

There is something beautiful about that.

Receiving life

Life keeps arriving too.

Some of it we wanted.

Some of it we desperately hoped for.

Some of it we would have done anything to avoid.

A person arrives.

An opportunity arrives.

A disappointment arrives.

A loss arrives.

An idea arrives.

A morning arrives.

A realization arrives.

Receiving asks us to encounter what is here before immediately deciding what it means.

Not surrendering to it.

Not approving of everything that happens.

Not pretending pain is pleasant or injustice is acceptable.

Simply beginning with reality.

Meet what is here before deciding what it means or what must be done.

Then we can respond.

There may be joy to appreciate.

Pain to acknowledge.

Help to seek.

Something to change.

A choice to make.

Receiving gives us somewhere to begin.

A way of living

Perhaps Receiving is ultimately less a technique than a way of standing in the world.

Open enough to be surprised.

Humble enough to know we do not know everything.

Curious enough to wonder.

Secure enough to allow another person to be different from us.

Compassionate enough to believe there is something to understand.

Strong enough to maintain boundaries without withdrawing humanity.

And grateful enough to recognize what an extraordinary thing it is that another life has crossed ours.

There you are.

I do not need to decide who you are yet.

I do not need you to prove why you deserve to be here.

I do not need to make you more like me.

I do not even need to completely understand you.

There is a you here worth discovering.

And there is room here for you to discover that person too.

I am glad you are here.

Here I am too.

Still arriving.

Still discovering.

Still becoming.

Two human beings alive at the same moment in the history of this world, sharing some small piece of existence.

What an extraordinary opportunity.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts we can give one another is enough safety, belonging, freedom, curiosity, and love to become more fully ourselves.

There you are.

Here I am.

We are here to receive one another.