

Being on the verge of moving from a 20 something to a 30 something was not a pleasant transition. My entire 29th year I tortured myself with self judgments about what I had yet to manifest, and how far my real life was from the life I had dreamed for myself.

It was in the middle of that funk that I found out via a group e-mail what was happening to women in Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban. It shook me to the core. Stories of women being stoned to death in front of their children, for something as minor as showing an ankle or a wrist in a marketplace, inspired a depth of compassion within me unlike any I had ever experienced before. It immediately put my self torture in perspective, and brought my narcissism to a sudden halt. What took its place was a deep desire to help these women somehow.

With no way to connect directly with women in Afghanistan, I started a little ritual every day to honor and quietly care for them. Someone once told me that old fashioned houses had lower doors not because people were shorter in the olden days, but because it was custom at that time to bow your head as you entered a home in order to remind yourself to interact “heart first.” Stealing from that old story (Is it even true? I don’t know!), every time I came home to my less than luxurious rent control apartment in LA, I would pause at the door, drop my head below my heart, and intend that all my activities in my apartment- from washing my dishes to brushing my teeth to answering e-mail to sleeping- would be a generator of caring energy which would feed compassion, healing, and support to women in Afghanistan. I used HeartMath tools to ground that intention into reality, never expecting to see a tangible outcome to this- I just had a quiet sense of faith that my care would get there, in its own way, in its own time.

A week went by, and as I radiated this care outward through my heart in simple daily activities, my own vitality soared. My heart was more available to others and I was less fixated on what was “missing” in my world.

Then a very surprising thing occurred. Three Afghan youth stopped into the herbal pharmacy where I worked. In their teens and early twenties, these three courageous souls had smuggled video cameras under their Burkas and shot the first footage of what was happening to women in Afghanistan. A news correspondent found them, and their footage, while documenting their refugee camps in Pakistan. The news correspondent then brought them, along with their tapes, to Sundance Film Festival. They were passing through LA on their way back from Sundance when they stopped into the herbal pharmacy where I worked to seek treatment for their zits! (I have never resented acne in quite the same way since that day!)

I gave them herbs for their skin, feeling that they were in fact an answer to my prayer to in some small way be of service to the plight of women in Afghanistan. But it did not stop at acne treatment. It turns out that these three inspiring young people had formed an organization they called the Afghan Youth Society, bringing together over 5,000 children and teens within Afghanistan and in refugee camps in surrounding areas, secretly teaching them to end hate and violence, and to read and to write. We exchanged e-mails. I began sending e-mails to them, which expressed my care and concern and compassion

for what was happening there, as well as offered teachings about the power of the heart to find freedom in any situation. Edris, the leader of their organization, had my letters translated into three Afghan languages. Children from the refugee camps in Pakistan then smuggled my translated letters into Afghanistan and secretly distributed them among the women there. The women immediately started to write me back.

One letter that I received was from Fawzia. During Taliban rule, all too many women saw suicide as their only remaining act of power and choice. Fawzia told me in her letter that she had purchased the cleaning fluid that was common for women to drink as suicidal poison, and was preparing to kill herself and her three daughters when my letters began to arrive. It saved her life, she said, to know through my letters that people in the West understood what was happening to women in Afghanistan, and cared. That gave her hope that things could change, and that her daughters might have a better future. It gives me chills now to write that and remember it.

My exchange with the Afghan women lasted for several years. They sent me bracelets and necklaces they made with special Afghan turquoise, and photographs of the stunning green fields and mountains in their homeland. Their courage and resourcefulness put me to shame as they showed me by their example to follow my dreams, no matter what the risk.

I still feel sorry for myself sometimes, still feel a gap between my dreams and my reality, still forget the power of my heart to care for others and to make a quiet but important difference in the world. Then I remember Fawzia, and the magic of how I came to know and love women in Afghanistan. While Fawzia said that I saved her life, it is really her example and our connection that brings life back into me now when I forget the power of my heart to change the world.