

Honoring Your Boundaries

Class #7

In the first class some of you envisioned a house that represented yourself. It may have been old or modern. It may have had many rooms or few rooms. However you imagined your house, it was your space. You didn't see someone else's house inside yours (hopefully) and there was usually a clear delineation between the walls of your house and the walls of someone else's house. Even if you created a space that was out in nature with no perceivable limits, there was still an energetic imprint on the territory you inhabited. You had a sense of where you ended and where someone or something else began. You had a sense of your own boundaries.

So, what are boundaries? According to Anne Katherine in a book entitled Boundaries, "a boundary is a limit or edge that defines you as separate from others. A boundary is a limit that promotes integrity." She explains that you have a physical boundary, like every other living organism. Your skin is the limit on your body. But there are also other boundaries that extend beyond your skin. For example, if people stand too close to you, it feels as if they have crossed an invisible boundary, (and the degree to which this is so differs from culture to culture). You have many kinds of boundaries besides your physical boundary. You also have emotional, relational, sexual, and spiritual boundaries. Katherine emphasizes:

You have a limit to what is safe and appropriate. You have a border that separates you from others. Within this border is your *youness*, that which makes you an individual different and separate from others... We have a set of feelings and reactions that are distinctly ours. We respond to the world uniquely based on our individual perceptions, our special histories, our values, goals, and concerns. We can find people who react similarly, but no one reacts precisely as we do.

Each person has a unique set of boundaries. These are developed over many years. Some may be very rigid and extreme in reaction to some bad experiences, while others may have boundaries that are almost non-existent because their boundaries were never honored as children. Before you can have healthy boundaries, you need to believe that you have a right to your own thoughts, feelings, beliefs and behaviors. You must believe that you are worthy of respect.

Boundaries are there to be honored by you and by others. You have a sexual boundary that gives you the right to determine how anyone interacts with you sexually. The emotional boundary dictates what you choose to reveal or not reveal to another and how close you want to be to another person. There are relational boundaries as well. Relationships have different roles that define the

appropriate boundaries. A parent has an appropriate role in relationship to a child just as an employer has an appropriate role in relationship to her employee. It would be a violation of a relational boundary for the parents to be sexual with their children or share their emotional trauma with them. It would be a violation of a relational boundary for a boss to insist on knowing the personal details of her employee.

You learned about boundaries as a child when you were taught how others could treat you. If you were mistreated as a child, you would probably allow others to mistreat you as an adult. If the roles of a teacher or parent or relative were unclear and abusive, then you would have difficulty saying no to such behavior by others in similar roles. You would not have a clear sense of what is normal. You would have to learn that you always have a right to be treated with respect and that you do not have to tolerate abuse in any form.

There are also spiritual boundaries. You are entitled to your spiritual beliefs. No one else can tell you what you have to accept as true. Only you can know from deep inside you what is right for you as you listen to your own connection to the Divine or Source. If anyone tries to coerce you into believing something, or sharing something about your beliefs, it is a violation of your spiritual boundary.

You can understand so much about the honoring of boundaries when you reflect upon your experience of the Divine. The Divine completely respects your individuality, your choices, and your free will. It's ironic that those who tout God's will can often be the most intolerant of all. They have a set of morals that they feel must be forced upon everyone. Yet the evidence of the tolerance of the Divine, to the chagrin of many, is all around you. The Divine does not force anyone to act in any particular way. All behaviors are tolerated even if they seem opposed to what is loving and enlightened. Rather than being robotic, having to respond in a particularly spiritual way, you have the freedom to discover what is life-giving to you. You are not programmed to act only one way, or to think only one way. The Divine does not force you to love. You always have choice as to how you want to respond to anything or anyone. You can symbolically build as many concrete walls in your house as you want to keep the light that emanates from Source to a minimum. The light does not dissolve those walls because it knows what is best for you!

You need to honor your own differences and honor the choices of others, even if you don't approve of them. There is no one way that is right for everyone. No two persons are alike. Each is uniquely loved. Each has a unique response. You only have to look at nature to realize that diversity is not just tolerated; it is encouraged by the Divine presence that permeates it all.

The worksheet and meditation that follows will help you reflect on your own personal boundaries—where they need strengthening, and where they need softening. Hopefully you will realize that you deserve to be treated with respect and that your individuality is celebrated and honored by the Divine.