

# Heart to Heart Resuscitation ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ Shobi Dobi

One day in the Intensive Care Unit, I stopped at a patient's door to survey the situation and ask permission to enter. I could not see the patient from the doorway, but the family eagerly beckoned me to enter. Cheerfully I bounced in, but I was not prepared for what I saw. This poor woman had some sort of skin disorder. I was so shocked that my reflex was to gag -- retch. I did manage to get back into character, but my reaction to that reaction left me leery, worried and cautious. My own reaction-- horror to embarrassment -- had blocked my compassion.

On another occasion in a convalescent home, I asked permission to enter the room of a man about 35 years old. "Blink twice if you want me to stay." His lips were moving so I bent close to him trying to understand what he was saying. The odor from his disease was strong and the gag reaction hit me. Backing off, I did a silly little turn and came back, but the gag kept coming. I finally concentrated enough on his voice that the gag stopped. (He wanted me to close the bathroom door!)

It would be nice to report that my compassion was so strong that all I saw was the love in their hearts, but I am still very much a student working to become a more effective instrument of compassion. Sometimes I need some sort of tool to deal with sensory shock when my compassion fails me. I'm sure I'm not the only one who has these reactions. I believe this keeps a lot of people from visiting nursing homes, both family and clowns.

A tool I use to get over various "unpleasant" odors (with bed pans and diarrhea accidents etc.) is my little spring skunk<sup>14</sup> who lives in a bed pan on my cart. Pulling out "Flower" shifts the attention and the embarrassment of both patient and clown. This will work for bodily function "unpleasantness." We can laugh with each other about the human discomforts that we all share -- not so with the unpleasantness and sometime horror of disease.

A friend of mine who works in nursing homes told me that she has disciplined herself to immediately turn off these odors and sense shocks. It has been said "If you can't turn it over, then turn it off, but know that you're turning it off." This professional detachment is a good survival technique; however, if I wish to remain spontaneous and keep my heart open to the intuitive moment, how can I turn off? Besides, I have come to long for the inspirations of compassion. It is what keeps me doing this work.

*Wavy Gravy*, of Woodstock fame and a long time clown at Oakland Children's Hospital writes:

"There was this one little kid. He was horribly burned. He looked like burnt toast. Pieces of his face weren't there. Pieces of his ears were missing. Where was his mouth? You could hardly tell who he was. There was no way of pinning a person to the face, what little there was of it.

"It was just terrible, just mind-boggling. My jaw dropped, I gasped, and I came completely unglued. I was overwhelmed. And my mind went off in all sorts of directions. 'What's it going to be like if he lives? What if I had a child this happened to? What if this happened to me?'

"So there we were, burnt toast and unglued clown. Quite a sight, I bet. And I'm fighting just to stay there, trying to find a way to get past my horror.

"All of a sudden, this other little kid comes whizzing by--I think he was skating along with his IV pole-- and he stops and kinda pushes around me, and looks into the crib at this other kid, and comes out with, 'Hey, YOU UGLY!' Just like that. And the burnt kid made this gurgling laugh kind of noise and his face moved around, and all of a sudden I just went for his eyes, and we locked up right there, and everything else just dissolved. It was like going through a tunnel right to his heart. And all the burnt flesh disappeared, and I saw him from another place. We settled right in.

"YOU UGLY!' Right. He ugly. He probably knows how ugly he is more than anyone else. And if he's gotta deal with people hanging around with saliva coming out their mouths, it's gonna be extra horrible. But if somebody just meets him in the eye and says, 'Hey, what's happening? Wanna hear a riddle?'"

Wavy Gravy continues: "So being able to look 'You Ugly' in the eye . . . that's done a lot for me. Because once I do that, I can go on to see what might be done that can ease things up. And you get all kinds of inspiration." (3)

When the gag reaction hits, stop, nurture the performance pause, develop the moment. Don't panic.

As Ram Dass puts it, "Rushing about with this reactive and zealous urgency infects the situation with a toxic tension which is the last kind of mental state anyone who's suffering needs."

This is what my head tells me, but it was a real struggle until I read the following from The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, by Sogyal Rinpoche. (4)

"Using a friend to Generate Compassion: [A] technique for arousing compassion for a person who is suffering is to imagine one of your dearest friends, or someone you really love, in that person's place. Imagine your brother or daughter or parent or a best friend in the same kind of painful situation. What more would you want than to free them from their torment?"

This takes some practice -- resisting the instinct to "flee." Try to stay present. Stop and take advantage of the clowns' performance freeze or pause, look into the patient's eyes and see your best friend. (Again words from Ram Dass) "Heart-to-heart resuscitation!"

Mother Teresa, describes lepers she cares for as "Christ in all his distressing disguises."

Sogyal Rinpoche continues: "[Understand] how powerful and miraculous the working of compassion is. It blesses and heals all those involved: the person who generates compassion, the person through whom that compassion is generated, and the person to whom that compassion is directed. Compassion is the wish-fulfilling gem whose light of healing spreads in all directions."

Is this not worth the risk of opening your heart?