

Leaning into Discomfort for the Sake of Healing

By Lori Nura Dolan

The morning of Tuesday, July 21, 2015, my last conscious memory was of me, my friend Jennifer, and the nurse laughing; and now there were twelve people in the room with me and the doctor told me I had flat-lined and they had to re-start my heart with the crash cart. I had died and they had brought me back to life. God knows when it is our time and, thankfully, it was not my time, so God breathed life back into me. My experience provided spiritual healing for so many people and I am grateful now to share how it all unfolded.

In June of 2015, I was enrolled in the USHS YR4 Ministry Masters. My guidance for the year was to really embrace self-care. For me the definition of self-care was to be able to find the places where I disconnect from Allah and doubt my truth. Another way this can play out for me in my relationships and interactions is that I begin to make decisions based on fear instead of Divine guidance. This results in me moving from a place of constriction or what I refer to as 'protect-mode' instead of a place of expansion and feeling safe with being completely transparent and vulnerable. The end result is me fumbling for the rope of Allah instead of steadfastly clinging to this rope.

Since one of the areas that caused a consistent disconnection from Allah was my place of employment it seemed natural to begin to explore where healing needed to occur in this area of my life. When one of our instructors for the Ministry Masters, Hamid Werder, offered a tele-class during the first intercession of classes titled 'Love Your Work', I knew this was the start of my exploration. This class called to me because of troubles with whom I worked with and was finding no satisfaction in the work I was performing. On a consistent basis I was experiencing feelings of suffocation and frustration. Although this was the case, I held admiration and respect for the company where I worked.

I had been employed for 9 years by this company, carrying the responsibility of middle-manager and reporting to a male Senior Manager along with two other women. Our team comprised the financial and log accounting team for a division of the company. When I enrolled in the 'Love Your Work' tele-class the relationship with my boss was strained and the relationship with a subordinate teammate was strained. I did have a healthy work relationship with one team mate, but the team as a whole was highly dysfunctional.

Prior to joining the first class of the 'Love Your Work' series, I dropped into my heart bowing very deeply to Allah asking for Him to help me set an intention to open my heart to all that was being offered from this class. And that whatever is in the highest for all involved to please move through and bring us into the love. Asking for Allah to show me why I did not love my work. And asking for Him to show me what it was in me that was blocking the love from unfolding on my team. And asking, that as the places that were blocking the love appeared, to please forgive me for my trespasses and to bring the deep healing that we all needed. Once my heart's intention was set it did not take long for the healing to start unfolding within my team.

It is interesting how Allah moves us and others in our vicinity when we set our intention for love and healing to guide us to the places where we are stuck and to bring us into the Unity. I do not believe that circumstances started occurring because I had set the intention to find out why I did not love my work. Rather, I believe my heart's awareness began to open and to feel that something was not right and had not been right for quite some time. As the awareness started unfolding, an understanding surfaced that I was going to have to speak up to someone about the situation on my team. And that this understanding was sending off a resonance that was connecting others to the situational vibration.

This vibration was first picked up by a Senior Executive in our corporate office that I interfaced with on a daily basis. Our conversation started with them sharing that they had a sense that something was not right and what their specific concerns were. I was able to confirm their concerns and shared with them what my concerns were. This conversation led to a formal complaint being filed with the company's HR Department. And the conversation started a chain of events that has transformed me for the rest of my life.

While on vacation with my family the first week of July I received a call from our HR Manager. She informed me that based on the concerns I had raised they were hiring an attorney and launching a formal investigation into the circumstances. She also shared that some informal discussions had taken place and there were others in the company that had similar concerns to mine. They reassured me that it would be confidential, but could not guarantee that my manager would not be aware that it was me who filed the initial complaint. I was terrified and the first thing that popped into my mind was that I was going to lose my job.

One of the many blessings that come with taking a tele-class offered by USHS, or being enrolled as a student, is you receive direct and immediate support from the faculty of instructors. They are aware how transformative this work is and have a deep understanding of the support that is needed when it is in play. With this understanding, I immediately reached out to Hamid to receive support with the terror that was starting to quickly consume me. I knew that the only way I was going to make it through this was with Divine connection and guidance. I had a felt sense that I needed to trust in Allah. That He had my best interest at heart and that nothing, but what is right for all, would come out of the situation. For some people complete reliance on Allah comes easy, for me it is a moment-to-moment exercise. I love Allah, but I forget that He loves me in every moment no matter what.

The second week of July when I returned from vacation I had a list of clearly written out concerns. This was the result of my support session with Hamid. Prior to this everything had been a verbal conversation with HR and I felt that it was important to write everything out so that it was concrete. This allowed for me to read it over and remain focused on what the actual issues were instead of the emotions surrounding the issues. It also provided me with a deep knowing that even though what was unfolding was extremely difficult it was the right thing to do.

During the week of my return from vacation my manager and team-mates were acting as if they knew nothing about the investigation. I knew that they all knew something was going on because they had been asked to meet with the attorney that was hired to investigate the circumstances. There had also

been a meeting scheduled for me to meet with the attorney later in the week on Thursday. At my appointment with the attorney I answered their specific questions and shared my written concerns. As I was leaving the appointment one of my team-mates was waiting out in the reception area. She asked me if I knew what was going on and I told her she may have a better understanding after her appointment with attorney. I had been told by HR that I could not discuss any of the investigation with my team. That it had to be held in the strictest confidence.

It happened that the Friday of this same week was our company picnic. We were also celebrating the birthday of the company's CEO. I had previously volunteered to help set up for the festivities. The whole time I was helping to set up I kept feeling like everyone knew what was going on. Then when the Executive Management team showed up for the picnic I was freaking out inside. I had one very strong story, which was that the Executive Management team all thought I was a trouble maker and when the investigation was done I was going to lose my job. The stories were intensified because I had not slept over three hours in a night since I received notice that HR was going to hire an attorney to investigate my concerns. However, I was able to find comfort in my family being at the picnic. I was able to remain grounded because I kept turning in my heart to Allah. I allowed the comfort of my family and the awareness of my connection to Allah to ground me in truth instead of my illusory stories that were founded in fear.

The Sunday following the company picnic was the last day of an annual fair that occurs in the city my family and I live in. There is a firework show that concludes the five day fair. My family and I had planned to go ride the rides, eat fair food, and watch the fireworks. My 8 year old son was very excited and ready to move on to the festivities of this day. When we arrived at the fair it was all we could do to grab a bite to eat and hit the rides due to my son's excitement. As my husband and son rode some rides I finished eating my sandwich.

As I was watching them on their second ride, I started to experience an uncomfortable burning in my chest and started breaking out in a sweat. I thought the burning and the sweating was from the horseradish on my sandwich. It was a warm sunny evening, but not overly hot. Finally, I became so uncomfortable and was experiencing a strong urge to get my bra off. I was starting to get disoriented. As I was standing there watching my son and husband I leaned against a pole and mouthed to my husband that something was wrong with my heart.

At this point all I wanted to do was go home and lie down. I did not want to ruin my son's fun by having my husband take me home so I texted a friend that was at the fair to see if she could give me a ride home. She had not responded by the time the ride was over and as my husband exited the ride I told him I needed to go home and lie down. I again repeated that I thought something was wrong with my heart. He became very concerned and asked if I needed to go to the hospital. This caused me to be embarrassed and to minimize my physical experience. I told him I just needed to lie down. My husband and son immediately drove me home. Once I was home, I threw up my whole dinner, put on my pajamas and went to bed. My husband headed back down to the fair with our son to meet our daughter to watch the fireworks. I learned a few days later that I never should have done this. I should have had my husband call 911 immediately.

Monday morning I woke up feeling deeply connected to Allah and encouraged about how the investigation was going. I was up early since I was headed to our Seattle office for the day, which is a two hour drive in traffic, and needed to stop into my local office prior to heading north. As I was leaving the house my husband made me promise that if I had any more chest pain I would go to the doctor. I promised this, but reassured him it was just heart burn from the horseradish and I was fine. When I arrived in my local office I shared the story of what happened to me with my trusted team-mate, Jennefer. She was very concerned, but I told her it was nothing. While I was in our Seattle office I had a meeting with the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) and he assured me that I would not be losing my job as a result of the investigation. The company's only priority was to address the valid concerns and correct the circumstances that allowed for the situation to get off track. I had not experienced any chest pain throughout the day and was convinced it was just heart burn. The meeting with the CHRO had settled my nerves and I was finally able to get a full night of sleep.

Tuesday I woke up feeling grounded and connected. I headed into the office and was looking forward to the day. I sat down at my desk and booted up my computer. Sitting at my desk I remembered it was the company picnic on Friday so there would likely be some left over cake in the kitchen. I opened my email and headed down the hall to the kitchen. There it was the enormous left over chocolate cake. I served myself a healthy piece and headed back to my office. I took my first bite as I started to read my email. Immediately after I swallowed the first bite of cake my chest started burning. Then I started sweating. Then I became so disoriented I could not gather my thoughts to respond to emails. I immediately opened the internet and searched for 'Preliminary Signs of a Heart Attack'. What caught my attention was that the symptoms could come and go.

I walked down to Jennifer's office and told her I needed to go to the hospital. Since I had shared my story with her on Monday she knew there was a potential that it could be a serious issue. She asked if she should call 911 and I told her no. I reassured her it was probably just heart burn again, but I had promised my husband I would go to the doctor if it happened again. As we drove to the hospital, I kept thinking how stupid this was and minimizing what was happening. She dropped me off at the door to the emergency room and went to park the car. As I stood there and waited I almost started walking to where she was parking to suggest we just leave. However, this small voice rose up inside me and said, 'stay right where you are'. I texted my husband and told him I was at the hospital and going to get a stress test on my heart. He said he was two hours away and asked if he should come to the hospital. I told him not to worry about it because it was just a stress test. I had no idea whether I would receive a stress test on my heart or not, but just assumed this is what happened when you showed up to the hospital with chest pain.

Jennifer and I walked into a completely empty emergency room. The intake nurse asked me what was wrong. I shared what had happened on Sunday and then what had brought me to the hospital. She gave me a beeper and I went and sat down. About five minutes later a nurse named John came out to greet me. Once we got into the ER room he asked me to remove my shirt and bra and to put on the hospital gown. Jennifer, the nurse and I were laughing...this was all I remember before my heart went into cardiac arrest. When I came back into my body I thought the nurses and doctors had been hired by

my employer and were trying to kill me by suffocation. Once I calmed down and realized they were there to save my life, I was rushed into surgery to have 4 stents placed in my LAD artery.

The inner lining of this artery had completely separated from the outer layer, what is defined as a tear. Since there were no blockages in the artery the lining separation ran the whole length of the artery causing it to collapse and lose pressure. The primary job of the LAD artery is to feed blood to the base of the heart. So when the blood stopped flowing through this artery my heart stopped. Local anesthesia was provided during the surgery so I was conscious during the whole procedure. This allowed time for the weight of what had just happened to flood over me. I thought about my children who had no idea their mother had just died and come back to life, and how close they were to losing me. And I thought about my husband who thought I was just going to have a stress test. It then occurred to me that if this had happened on Sunday, while my family was at the fair, they would have come home and found me dead. I was so overwhelmed with gratitude that I was alive and that I would see my family again the healing tears would not stop.

When I returned home from the hospital I felt like I had some decisions to make. The biggest decision was whether working under the current stress of my job was worth losing my life. I eat healthy, exercise daily and overall have very healthy habits. Therefore the main contributor to my heart disease was stress or a possible heart defect. Since the heart defect had been repaired by stents, I felt it was important to manage the stress in my life. I made the decision to not return to work. The basis of my decision was that I no longer wanted to work on a dysfunctional team. I decided I would study for a professional exam and focus on its completion. Then find the job of my dreams. However, God had every intention of answering my prayers.

About four weeks into my medical leave from work I was asked to meet the HR director at a coffee shop. The intention of the meeting on my employers end was to have a conversation to let me know how the investigation ended and decide on a date to return to the office. The intention of the meeting on my end was to let them know I would not be returning and negotiate a severance package. When I communicated this to the HR director he was not surprised. He agreed the company would provide me with a severance package and understood why I did not want to return. At the close of our meeting he asked if I was comfortable meeting with the CEO. The CEO had shared his concerns about the circumstances that had unfolded on my team and wanted to formally apologize to me. I agreed to meet with him.

Our meeting took place about two weeks later. The CEO apologized and then asked me to reconsider my decision. He emphasized that the company really would like to do the right thing in this circumstance. And that if the situation was not corrected from the top down there would be a shift in leadership on my team. Although my desired outcome was to not get anyone fired, I also did not want to continue working under the guise of pretending things were 'fine'. I told him that I needed to pray about this. That I really needed to contemplate what would work for my team as a whole if I were to return. He told me to take my time and emphasized this time would be paid and as long as I needed.

At this point I reached out to Hamid again. We sat together and he helped me ask very deeply what my heart needed. What my heart needed was to return to work and complete the healing that had been started. Throughout some back and forth conversations over the next few days we outlined five conditions of my return. Once they were articulated and felt solid I reached out to the CEO. I shared with him how grateful I was for the opportunity to meet with him. And that I had made a decision to return. I then outlined the five conditions of my return. He was thrilled and agreed to every one of them.

Returning to work was not easy. It required me to be securely rooted in faith in Allah's goodness and to be courageous. For me these are two areas where I can easily waver into stories and old patterns of protection / disconnection. To ease this transition my first condition was to have a meeting prior to returning with my manager and his two superiors, the President of Forestry and the CFO. At this meeting the conditions of my return were discussed. There was also a verbal commitment from my manager that he agreed with and would comply with the conditions.

The theme of the remaining four conditions was that my team, manager and I receive coaching. In addition to the dysfunction of the management the team was receiving there were also strains in relationships between my coworkers and myself. The trust between us had been completely shattered from previous interactions and the investigation. Our first coaching session was scheduled the week of my return. The topic of this discussion was how our stories about reality can be very different from what is actually happening in reality. This is a result of our stories (beliefs) being rooted in personal biases and / or past traumas that can be triggered by stressful circumstances and / or interactions.

As we moved toward the end of this coaching session the team was asked if we had any stories (beliefs) surrounding the investigation. This is where application of all that had been transmitted to me at USHS came to fruition. It had prepared me to be an advocate of truth and light. No one was speaking up and my guidance was that if I did not speak up in this moment the healing process would be impeded. Reciting bismillah ir-rahman ir-rahim in my heart, I spoke up to the team and our coach. Expressing that I was carrying a belief that my manager and my coworkers thought that I filed a complaint with HR to get our manager fired. This opened the flood gates and everyone began to share their thoughts and emotions. My willingness to be vulnerable and openly share in spite of my fear became the healing catalyst for the weeks to come. Our bravery to share going forward allowed for all of us to demonstrate our commitment to each other and the success of our team. It confirmed to me that when you are in alignment with God everything is possible.

Over a period of six months we completed our group coaching. We have all agreed to be 'Champions of Conflict'. This means we have committed to not pretending things are moving along fine when there is a current of unrest among us. We are committed to leaning into discomfort for the sake of trust, respect, and accountability. I feel so very blessed that God unfolded this opportunity in my life. I have learned what was for me a life-saving lesson - when I allow for spiritual healing to evolve and guide me, versus me believing I can evolve and guide myself or others, the most beautiful experiences unfold. Alhamdulillah! (All Praise is Only for God!)

