
EMMA:
Pocket of Love

*Yellowed newspapers and magazines piled high.
Old clothing overflowing cardboard boxes.
Paper bags, plastic bags, gift wrapping, and bows.
Books and magazines covered with dust—
Oy vey, what state of mind is this?*

KOAN

Emma was a hoarder. One night, asleep in her tiny, overstuffed apartment, she had a dream. A man was cooking a meal for her and a woman was helping her clean. Emma herself was sorting through a large stack of cards. Suddenly, she felt suffused with love. Emma said, "I am unrestricted. Why am I holding on to this stuff? There is endless possibility."

Upon waking, Emma declared out loud: "I am a pocket of love and so is everyone else." The next day while looking out the window, Emma heard the trees, grasses, and walls saying to her, "Love. Love."

She went to see her teacher and asked, "What will I do when this awareness fades away?"

Her teacher replied, "Shifting to love is as easy as smiling."

REFLECTION

Emma had lived well into her seventh decade with a nagging belief that she was not lovable. Although she had accomplished much in her life, she hid within herself and cluttered her apartment with belongings, unable to sort through them and clear them out. She had glimpses into how she came to be like this, but she felt it would be too difficult to change.

Perhaps there is a bit of a hoarder in each of us. Do you use things to create a protective barrier around you? Some people may also hoard due to a sense that they lack something essential, that there is a hole inside that nothing—not even all the love in the world—can fill. Sometimes a nagging voice saying *I am unlovable* lives within us as a whisper, at other times a shout, loud and clear.

Perhaps you, too, are consumed with an underlying fear that you are unlovable. No matter how much you have meditated, extended loving kindness to yourself and others, or done years of therapy, the sense of being unlovable persists. Perhaps you employ strategies of self-improvement or a change in circumstance, or you become the best at your job to compensate for this lack.

One night, Emma dreamed that she was whole and complete. She saw that she herself was a pocket of love. Emma's realization reminds me of the monk Seizei, who seeks to be released from a poverty-stricken spirit. He goes to Master Sozan and begs for help. Master Sozan replies, "You have already drunk three cups

of the finest wine and still you say that you have not moistened your lips."¹⁴ How is it that you yourself are the finest of wines and yet you do not know it?

When you keep opting for the old habitual ruts, rerunning the stories in your head around fear, self-doubt, and self-hatred, the choice you're making reinforces your self-absorption. Instead, imagine creating a huge compost pile full of fear, self-doubt, and self-hatred. As you add these ingredients to the compost, practice accepting these qualities without indulging them as you tend and turn the pile. Do this over and over again, exerting great patience as you accept all that you are, including your broken bits and all that you are hoarding. Extend love to your brokenness. By embracing your suffering tenderly in this way, this compost pile will become a nutrient-dense conditioner for the soil of your awakening.

Emma found that resting in love was liberating, preferable by far to living in her fears and perniciously limiting thoughts. Realizing that there was fundamentally no restriction, she could continuously choose love and live it moment by moment in full acceptance of whatever arose in her life. After a while, however, Emma became worried that this love, too, would pass. "What then?" she asked her teacher. Her teacher said, "Love is as easy as smiling."

Love is always right here, right now. Shortly after her dream, Emma made a big decision: She sorted through her belongings and moved to another state to live.

Shift!

Smile!

What's in your pocket? What protective barrier do you build around yourself to keep life at bay? Show me how you turn the compost pile of broken bits!