



To Witness and To Hold, by Mark Nepo

We have been battered by modern times into obsessive problem solvers, but as life pares us down into only what is essential, it becomes clear that the deepest sufferings of heart and spirit cannot be solved, only witnessed and held. I have struggled with this constantly. Just recently, after being away for two weeks, I returned to a tender partner who lovingly uttered, "I really missed you." Instantly, I reacted by scanning for ways to solve the feeling -- to limit my travel or call more often. I instantly tried to change my patterns of being away from the relationship, rather than just feel the poignancy of being loved enough to be missed. Frequently, this reflex to solve, rescue, and fix removes us from the tenderness at hand. For often, intimacy arises not from any attempt to take the pain away, but from a living through together; not from a working out, but from a being with. Trust and closeness deepen from holding and being held. I am learning, pain by pain and tension by tension, that after all my strategies fail, the strength of love waits in receiving and negotiating; in accepting each other and not problem solving each other; in listening and affirming each other, not trying to fix those we love. -- Mark Nepo