

## WAKING UP TO WHAT YOU DO (excerpt)

By Diane Eshin Rizzetto

### *Meeting Others on Equal Ground*

Sometimes, placing ourselves above others can take the form of being the harder worker the more responsible person. Here's an example. You and your partner come home from work and are very tired. The kids are hungry and it's time to cook dinner. You know your partner is tired and he or she knows you're tired. So who's going to get dinner on the table? Your partner collapses on the couch and says to you, "You'll have to cook." There are two ways you might head for the kitchen. One is with the thought, I'm tired, but one of has to do **it**, and I guess it's me. Another strategy would be to turn this situation into a way to elevate yourself. How do you suppose that process might go?

## CONVERSATIONS

*Student:* In this kind of situation, maybe I'd have the thought, "When I'm really tired in the future, she better do it for me."

*Diane:* Okay. First thought. What might come next?

*Student:* Maybe the thought, "What a good person I am."

*Another Student:* For me, in that situation, I might note resentment or martyrdom.

*Diane:* "How good I am! What a good and suffering person I am." Now there's a very long measuring stick! Where does that thought put your partner? In other words, if I'm the good person, then what does she have to be?

*Student:* Less than good.

*Diane:* Less than good. Yes. As soon as we enter into a comparison, we have entered into a judgment that separates and places me above the other. So if I'm good, then she must be less than good. If I'm a martyr, then she's got to be someone who needs to be saved. What about the resentment? The *why me*, Why do I have to be put into this situation? pattern of thinking. Well, guess who chose to cook the dinner? You did. But why the resentment? What's that about?

*Student:* I think when I feel resentment, I haven't really given over to just doing what needs to

be done. I do **it**, but there's a sense of holding back.

*Diane:* Yes. The hands move without the heart. The hands are really measuring.

*Student:* And if I'm not being recognized as good, the anger and resentment come in.

*Diane:* And what if you just cooked dinner because that action would best serve life in this particular set of circumstances?

*Student:* Then my heart would move my hands.

*Diane:* Without question.

## Measuring Up

Measuring ourselves in terms of how much we do for others can be tricky. A good signal that we're acting out of a requirement, however, can be if we note some upset if we are not acknowledged for our actions. When you don't get appreciation, how do you react? Do you have thoughts like, Look at all I've done and no one's patting me on the back or telling me what a great job I did? Do you get angry or feel rejected and unappreciated? Of course, in a certain sense, we all like to be acknowledged when we do things for others. I am not suggesting that there's anything wrong with this, but if we are doing for others in order to measure our self-worth in some way, or to measure up to someone else's expectations, then I would say that our helping comes with a price tag.

You can work your fingers to the bone; you can be the most capable person on the job; you can be an understanding partner and a caring parent, but as long as you look for confirmation of self-worth through helping others, then there's something to look at there.

Not only do we place ourselves above others, but also we can place ourselves below others. This is a particularly covert form of behavior and is worth exploration. If you find that you habitually compare yourself to others and place yourself on the short side of stick, then it's important to explore this way of thinking. There's a lot of *me* in the thought: He has more expertise on this subject than I and therefore, he's better than I; I may just as well resign from this committee—I'm no use. Sound oversimplified? Some of us find ourselves in this pattern often if we're in the game of comparing ourselves with others. What we don't get so easily is that it's really okay to not be good at every thing.

Whether we place ourselves above or below others, we are substituting an idea about who we or others are or should be for the simple truth that as human beings we are good at some things and not so good at other things. We fail and we succeed. We know and we don't know. We accomplish some useful things and we mess up some other things. This is what **it** means to be human.