Columns
Spirituality



Two sisters in formation: Sometimes all that we need is a hand around the shoulder and a whisper in the ear: "Come on, cheer up." (Tessy Jacob)



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Recently, the recollection of one of my past experiences made me ponder over the figure of the father in the parable of the prodigal son.

A long time ago, I had a misunderstanding with a friend. A few days later the person came to see me, and after a brief dialogue we were reconciled with each other. However, within a short period of time, I felt the friendship was deteriorating and there was no more cordialness in our interactions. Although the difference in our relationship was evident, I could not figure out what had gone wrong.

Days and weeks passed. The entire episode was only a vague memory. One day, a sudden realization struck me with great force. A question arose within me: In the parable of the prodigal son, if the father had not been so sincere in his welcoming, would the son ever have felt at home on his return?

The entire event played before my mind's eye like a drama: The son approaches his home with lots of apprehension and fear. He is prepared to hear the worst. Perhaps he is making his plans for what to do next if he is not welcomed; he is rehearsing the answers he will give his father in case he asks anything. … And there he sees his father, pacing up and down, and wonders what must be going on in his mind.

But in the end, son appears before his dad, and in the next minute father and son are in deep embrace. A Bollywood romantic scene — two lovers meeting after a brief fight! No words, only action.

Something clicked inside me. In my case, even when my friend was apologetic, somewhere in the back of my mind I believed that she ought to be sorry for what she did. While my words may have expressed a sincere apology, my attitude and action did not show it enough. As a result, our relationship started to deteriorate from that moment. Actions speak louder than words!

Another real example occurred to me then: If our mother gets furious with us, in that rush of anger she may swear not to feed us anymore. But when mealtime arrives, she calls us to eat! And there is not even a hint of what had happened a few minutes earlier. That's the love of a mother — a bond that endures through fights and reconciliations for a lifetime.

If our reconciliations with each other were more cordial, there would be fewer heartbreaks. In letting go, we often hold something back. We are not able to be generous like the prodigal father — to throw a banquet of love, to speak more loving and encouraging words, to express feelings of empathy and support, and to end it with a gesture of love. Had the father given him a cold and casual welcome, perhaps the son would have been burdened for the rest of his life with feelings of guilt and shame. He could have felt terribly unaccepted.

But the dad took care that his son could live again. Every time we repair a relationship, we also need to ask the same question: Am I going to let this relationship live longer, or am I going to plant the seeds of its death?

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Not every time nor in every circumstance can we be the prodigal father, prodigal in our love and forgiveness. But we certainly need to be, when the relationship matters to us. Things get out of hand when we are stingy in expressing our acceptance, or if we do not make it clear to the person that we mean "It's not *your* fault, it's *our* fault." Do we ever sit with them long enough for that friend to feast their fill on the banquet of love? Or we just serve some water to instantly quench their thirst, so we can leave quickly?

Reconciliation is complete only when we see the silver lining of a smile on the face of the person, or even some resounding hearty laughter. If this doesn't happen, be assured, the soup is not done yet! If you are not careful, it can spill out or never get cooked completely.

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