

## 11/07/08 *Notes from Nirvair*

After a long and hard-fought campaign season, half of America is celebrating it's victory while the other half finds itself disappointed and tries to re-group. I hope that during the coming transition period we as a nation will find a way to become less polarized, start seeing our similarity instead of our differences, recognize our shared hopes and dreams, our shared humanity.

It has been my experience that the first step of Change, is a change in my own perceptions. When I change the way I see others, my whole perception of possibility changes. When I see others as different from myself, my options and choices appear differently than when I see others as people like myself.

One recent Saturday morning I was talking to my daughter about school. She's a high school freshman and this is a new school for all of us. When she started talking about some stressful things that had happened and how they had been handled, I immediately reacted. "What's wrong with these people!???", I thought. After all, if this was our school, we'd do it differently! I started worrying that we'd made the wrong school choice, focussing on what's wrong, not helping. My daughter got more upset, now she was crying and became an object for me to rescue, proof that I was right and they were wrong. I wasn't thinking about what she as a person needed, just what was wrong with the others. Fortunately, I remembered my recent Arbing training which is all about seeing people as human beings. I thought about her personhood and started talking to her about her birthday which was coming up. I still wasn't able to think about how to help her. After our conversation I fired off an email to the school. Before pressing send, I remembered human beings would be receiving it and did an edit to remove the barbs. I'm sure there were some pointy words left, but it was better.

After sending the email I thought about what I was blaming them for not doing. Mostly I wanted them to understand my daughter, help her feel confident in herself and feel positive about school. I certainly wasn't helping in that department. As I was pointing a finger at them, three were pointing back at me. As soon as I could see it, everything changed.

What I could do to help suddenly became apparent. I realized I could help my daughter feel good about school as soon as I started feeling good about her school. I didn't have to wait for the administration to talk to the teachers, I already had been given their email addresses! Each teacher had already emailed the parents and I was too busy to have considered them relevant enough for a response! I saw things I could do to offer help to the school, to get involved.

During the next week I had lots of email conversations with the school which were very positive. Administrators were receptive and actually appreciative of my offers to help. The teachers explained what they were already doing for my daughter and I was reassured that the situation was not as dismal as it had looked through the eyes of a fourteen year old. My daughter and I had lots of conversations about how she could start to see differently.

It is ironic because as the head of Khalsa School I wish parents would get all the facts straight before reacting, find out the adult perspective before assuming the child's version of the story is complete or accurate. I wish parents would talk to us with a sense of partnership, realizing that we're all on the same side, we all want what's best for the children. Now I found myself on the verge of being the parent I'd rather not see in my office.

It's a revelation to see how our assumptions and perceptions create problems for ourselves, and our children. When I stopped seeing the individuals who work at my daughter's school as "the other", as different from myself, I could see more clearly how to help my daughter. When my seeing changed, everything changed.