



Acts of Kindness

Hold the Space with Me

In my family, the request, “Hold the space with me”, encompasses a variety of needs, which I will unravel in the context of our family dynamic. Originally, the expression arose as a response to a question from my husband and my practice of ‘being of benefit’ to our family. To set the course for our day – in particular on a weekend when time is more available – we would ask each other, “How can we be of benefit to our family today?” (echoes of Dr Tony Fernando) and do a quick mental round robin of our adult children and target one of them with this question.

Over the years, that implied or explicit request has evolved into the reply, “Maybe you could hold the space with me?” We have come to realise that often all that was required, or the most we could do - in the face of their compelling life demands – was just that: being there.

What this involves in practice is layered: it calls for ‘witnessing’ while they complete their tasks. Adding a level of ‘noticing’, verging on ‘accountability’ if deemed necessary, assists them to ‘stay the course’ while they complete a self-identified task. Furthermore, while witnessing, we also shield and shelter them from all else: the self-sabotage which would divert their attention to other distractions, or the interruptions from those who would seek access to them, to avail their attention, which if they were alone, they might find irresistible.

The completion of these possibly onerous tasks may be assuaged with nourishment, both literal and emotional. Time spent procuring and preparing healthy food and drink may be saved by the ‘space holder’. Encouragement may be offered when their spirits flag. Perspective may be given when catastrophic thinking arises, with an observation such as, “I have seen situations like this before. I am living proof that you do get through this.” Finally, noticing when they would do better to rest, or move, to create a circuit breaker when they are fatigued, may be another feature of this role.

Being asked to ‘hold the space with me’ is a kindness to both the giver and the receiver. The giver feels relevant to their world, a chosen member of their choir, necessary to them. The receiver fulfills their own tasks, keeps their agency, and knows they are not alone.