

Big Strong Yes #27: And I Am Beautiful

Reflection by [Kelly L. Jones, Ph.D.](#)

I Will Stand

I love seeing the fire coming back to [Lani](#). All hail our [Notorious Overlord](#). And I am feeling stronger, for the first time in a long time, because there's fire in me. It's fierce and it's mine. And I don't care how many times I have remind myself of this... I am going to keep reminding myself.

You can only douse a flame so many times without expecting the embers to die, and I have done that, over and over and over again. But the fire is real and I'm done trying to tame it. Done. I have cried enough.

Anyone who loves me is going to have to love me like this.

I've been rumbling with heartache and grief and I think that in some ways, this may always be the case. But I can hold love and loss in my heart at the same time, and there is a big difference between heartbreak and being broken. I'm strong enough to carry heartbreak. But the fire tells me that I am not broken.

I don't know if it's from the Aquarius season, or a new moon, or being drunk on some truly excellent poetry, but I feel this fire again. And I am stronger in flames than I'll ever be in tears, stronger in storms than I'll ever be in quiet, and even when I'm rumbling and reckoning with heartache and fear and change and desire and creativity and badassery and love, I'm stronger dancing with the thunder than I am curled up on the ground.

The arena be damned; I will stand.

But I have learned that I don't have to stand alone. Having strong friends stand with me does not make me weak.

I've always tried to learn from other people, and now I am learning how to lean on others, and not just lean on them, but lean into them, sharing myself in the process, and being vulnerable enough to be open in the leaning.

Ideas of giving and receiving have always challenged me, and learning to not only accept, but to ask, for fierce kindness when I need it; learning to receive love as

deeply as I give it; turning to friends not only for empathy and support but also for encouragement and strength and insight and inspiration, has been an incredible lesson, and one that has changed me.

And I am better for this integrated understanding of love.

Because the goal here is not some equilibrium between guilt and shame or between “never good enough” and “who do you think you are” or even between fear and desire...

The goal here is Joy.

Fierce happiness.

Courage, creativity, and the call to adventure.

And I want to choose magic.

But I am just now beginning to understand what [Brene Brown](#) meant by brave and brokenhearted. And this requires a deeper and truer appreciation of myself, which requires a lens made of love instead of the broken lens I usually use to look at myself.

For some reason, this insight was triggered by writing.

Sharing that Shitty First Draft last week was an incredibly difficult decision. When I was editing the show, I deleted it and added it back at least half a dozen times. But the idea of sharing vulnerability in real time tipped the scale in favor of leaving it in, unedited, word for word true to the first raw draft. I’m really surprised and tickled pink that some folks liked it, and liked my writing style, but that piece was written from a place of fear, not from a place of poetry.

I couldn’t see any beauty in it at all until friends showed the beauty to me.

Like looking at pictures of myself, the lens I use to read my own writing also seems to be broken. And this is why we have to be mirrors for each other, so we can show those we love their own beauty when they can’t see it for themselves.

Because I know how to love someone else well, deeply, passionately, fiercely, or even quietly, but I don’t know how to truly love myself. Love is what I give... and not really what I believe I deserve to receive, and the broken lens is strongest here.

After last week’s BSY episode, our friend [Joshua Unruh](#) listened to our ideas of not being lovable, and he said, “No. That’s not how real love works.”

And he sent us a [podcast episode by Pete Rollins](#), and it was the sort of thing that I would usually resist because it was based in theology, and being the heathen that

I am, I expected it to leave me cold. Or to make me really, really mad. I was braced for a sermon, but instead found a passionate discussion about love. So, thank you, Unruh, for pushing me out of my comfort zone... you're probably the only person who could have convinced me to listen to that.

And while the discussion was theological, Rollins damn well defined his terms, and wove epistemology with beautiful prose in a way that was intriguing.

So, I listened. And in listening, I learned some things.

There's an idea from that show that has stayed with me; it has burrowed itself deeply into me and will not let me go.

[Pete Rollins](#) said, "Love is like light. When we are sitting with friends we do not think about the light that surrounds us but only of the friends that the light enables us to see. Love, in a very precise way, enables us to see. Love does not make itself visible but rather makes others visible to us. Love does not exist but calls others into existence. Love does not stand forth but brings others forth. Love calls everything into existence."

And I can't shake this idea; it's so beautiful. And I keep wondering... What am I calling into existence through love? What does it enable me to see, and how does it enable me to be seen? What is calling me, bringing me to life, igniting the fire; what love am I open to receiving? If love calls everything into existence, can we call it down like the lightning by turning into it; by returning it, by making it, by understanding it as a force that is and not an object to have?

And here's the big idea... It seems to me that if love calls everything into existence, it means that we are, all of us, well and truly lovable. This idea has a hold of me now and it won't let go, because the rules of the universe can't be different for me (high holy podcasting priestess or not, the rules have to apply to me too). And the simple fact is, I have been called into existence.

I am here.

Standing.

Open, maybe for the first time in my life, to real love.

Brave and brokenhearted.

And I don't think it's that simple, and I don't think I can flip a switch and suddenly love myself well, and I don't think that I can move from explosive integration to synthesis to the top of Maslow's pyramid and just enjoy the view from that high place of self-actualization.

But I can see, and be seen, through a more holistic lens of love.

And of course, this goes back to [Elizabeth Gilbert](#), who said, "There are always obstacles. Sometimes it seems there are nothing BUT obstacles. But in the end, the question will always remain the same: "What are you willing to give up, in order to have what you really want?"

And now, finally, I can give that passionate question of "What Do You WANT?" a real answer... because what I want now is love. Real and deep, magical and romantic, messy and imperfect, but fierce and whole. I want that kind of love.

It feels like the Universe has been asking me what I want and I've been dancing to the edge for an answer and backing up from fear of what might happen if I actually answer the question. But not anymore.

I'm willing to give up the broken lens in order to have what I want. Because I have to. I want writing. I want magic. And I want love. To see and be seen; to call and be called. I want love, and so I have to give up the idea of not being lovable.

Lovability and divinity, and here we are again, but now it can be an active choice. And for me, romantic geek that I am, the answer is always going to be love.

Except when [the answer is 42](#). Because sometimes it is.

So, all that to say... Got that, Universe?

Was it clear enough? Did I define my terms well enough?

Yes?

Good.

Now bring it on, baby.

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